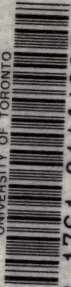


UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



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TO

FRANCIS JAMES CHILD

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH IN HARVARD UNIVERSITY

TO WHOM ALL STUDENTS OF CHAUCER OWE SO MUCH  
AND I PERHAPS MORE THAN MOST

THIS WORK IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

BY HIS FRIEND

THE AUTHOR

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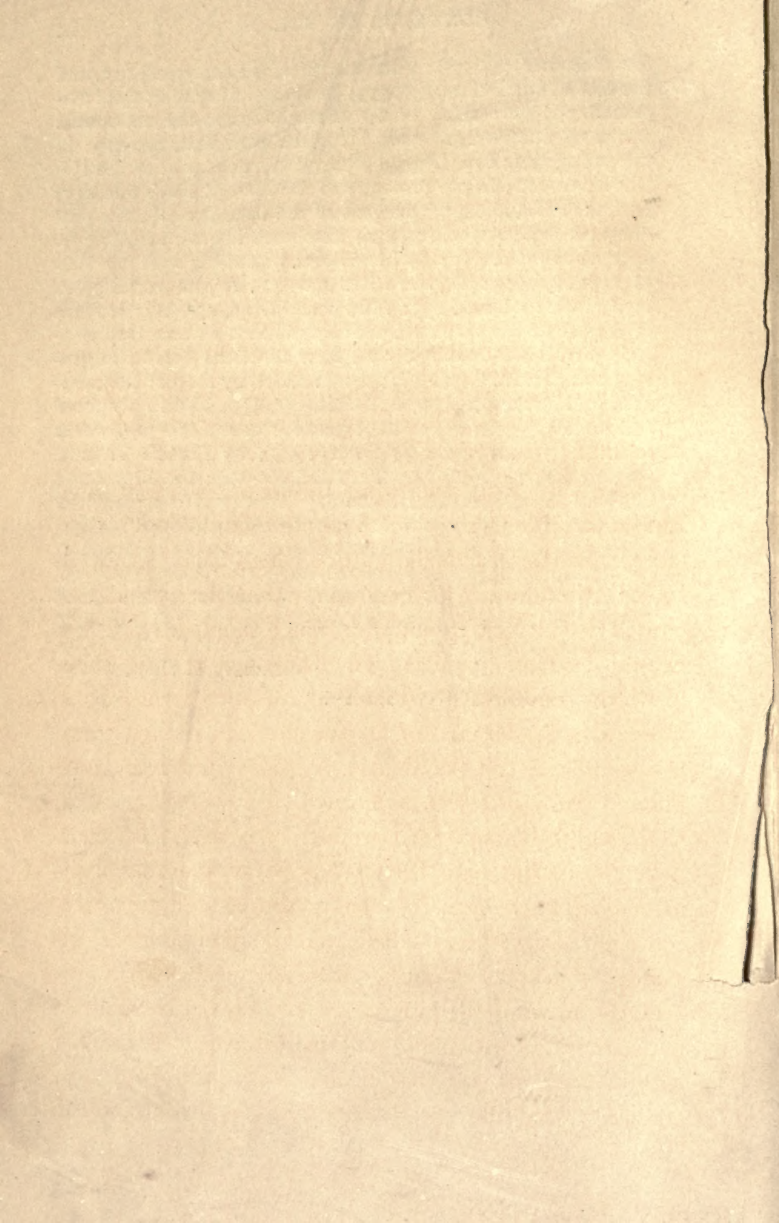
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## INTRODUCTION

ABOUT twenty-five years ago, a small volume containing nearly four thousand lines of Chaucer's poetry, with notes and a glossary, was issued from the Clarendon Press of Oxford University. It met at the outset with a respectable but by no means rapid sale. But on the title-page, which bears the date of 1886—the last year of this particular edition which I have chanced to see—the number printed up to that time stands recorded as sixty-six thousand. Since then the work has been revised and reissued. The whole number published has now undoubtedly mounted to many thousands more, and the circulation of the book in its new form is not unlikely to have already overtaken and even gone beyond the figures just mentioned.

Though this has been the most successful of all, it is nevertheless but one of several works of a similar character that have appeared during the last quarter of a century. Every year, indeed, adds to their number in a steadily increasing ratio. Editions of the poems of Chaucer, in whole or in part, are coming out constantly in England, in Germany, and in America. It is well within bounds to say that he has been more read and studied during the past twenty years than during the

previous two hundred. If this indicates nothing else, it shows the existence of a large class to whom Chaucer is something more than a name. A generation which could scarcely be spoken of as knowing him at all has been supplanted by a generation with which he is becoming a familiar and favorite author.

During the last quarter of a century also many investigations have been carried on which have had the effect of modifying materially views previously held in regard to Chaucer's life and writings. Much has been added to our real knowledge, much more has been taken from our supposed knowledge. The errors that have been corrected are, in truth, more important than the information that has been collected. But the results obtained, however familiar to special students, have in many cases not become generally or even widely known. In some instances too, when known, at least partially, they have been misapprehended or imperfectly comprehended. In other instances they have been looked upon with distrust, because while the results have been given, the reasons for the results have been withheld. The prevalent ignorance is in a measure excusable, because the fuller knowledge which now exists is largely scattered up and down the pages of periodicals, or is locked up in volumes of necessarily limited circulation which contain the proceedings of societies. It certainly has not been spread abroad sufficiently to overthrow in the minds of the general public the errors once universally accepted and still embodied in all older and in some newer books of reference. The same misleading statements continue to be made, the same exploded falsehoods continue to be repeated.

It was with the intention of putting together in a compendious and easily accessible form the results of the latest investigations that this work was undertaken. It was soon found impossible, however, to confine it within the limits originally set, nor was it, indeed, felt to be desirable. Two reasons there were that caused it to drift steadily from the point at which it started. In going over the ground it became evident that the investigations themselves sometimes needed to be investigated. Many new statements made with great positiveness appeared on close examination to be doubtful, or more than doubtful. Many of the new facts reported to be discovered seemed to have no more evidence in their favor than the facts they had displaced. Nevertheless, this was not the principal motive that led to the change of plan. There were numerous questions of great interest connected with Chaucer's life and writings that had either received no attention at all, or notice of the most cursory and superficial character. These, it was evident, would repay the fullest possible investigation. The consequence was that what had been the main object of the original undertaking, while by no means neglected, sank to a subordinate place. So different, in truth, has the work become not only from what was at first contemplated, but from anything that has hitherto been attempted, that there seems to be required a fuller preliminary account of its exact scope and design than would be expected in the case of one which treated of a well-worn subject. The personal details which the explanatory statement that follows necessitates will not, it is hoped, be deemed improper or out of place.



The three volumes contain eight chapters bearing upon the life and writings of Chaucer. These chapters constitute eight distinct essays, or rather monographs. It might, perhaps, be better to say seven, on account of the close relationship existing between the first two. Bound together as they all are by the unity of a common interest, there is a certain natural sequence in the order in which the subjects are taken up. Still, with the possible exception just referred to, the chapters are essentially independent of each other. Each monograph is complete in itself, and rarely necessitates even the consultation of any of the others. To give the reader in few words a conception of the character of each, I subjoin the following account of the aim of these various chapters, and a general idea of what is to be found in them.

The first chapter, in deference to custom, I have called a life of Chaucer. Strictly speaking, the title is a misnomer. What ordinarily goes under that name consists of little besides a small number of dates and a large number of conjectures. I have endeavored to give in it a clear and connected account of the series of isolated facts we are actually sure of in the personal history of the poet. I have refrained entirely from inserting what was once thought to be known, but is now known to be false. I have endeavored also to refrain from introducing any guesses that have been or can be framed to fill up the gaps that exist in the information we possess. Success may not always have attended the effort to exclude those of my own. Even he who has sufficient intelligence to perceive the folly of speculative biography

may not always have the strength to avoid it. The life of Chaucer is a field that blossoms luxuriantly with conjectures, and it is asking a good deal of him who enters it to abstain from plucking occasionally one of its flowers. All that will be claimed for this essay is that but few of them have been gathered, and in no instance has the fact been kept out of sight that they are only flowers, and never the ripened fruit of positive knowledge.

These are considerations that affect the contents of the biography. There are others that affect its general character. What we call a life of Chaucer is made up mainly of two things. There are, first, a few well-known facts concerning his places, his pensions, and his movements. There is, secondly, a series of discussions upon matters about which there neither is nor can be certainty. It is an examination of what may be the facts, not a record of what they are. It is these that make protracted an account which could otherwise be comprised within the compass of a very few pages. If, however, certainty cannot be attained in any given case, it is of importance that all the evidence on both sides of disputed questions shall be fully and fairly presented, so that the reader can be put in a position to come to a decision satisfactory to himself. This is particularly important in the discussion of the date of birth. It demands the completest examination, because upon our view of the time the poet was born depends largely the view we take of the time when his works were written. This must be the justification for the space that has been given up to the discussion of the evidence in the case of this vexed question. Discussions of several other topics

are for similar reasons scattered through the work. They are necessary, but it must be admitted that they are not exciting. In the narrative of real events the beginning of uncertainty is the end of interest. To read a life of Chaucer cannot by any possibility be so tedious as to write one; but it approaches dangerously near.

One further remark it may be well to make at this point. Chaucer was at least twice in Italy, and both times sent thither by the government on public business. The examination of the archives of certain of the Italian cities—especially Milan and Genoa—would probably show the result of his missions and might perhaps add something to our knowledge of his movements. The archives of the Italian cities are reported to be not only full and detailed, but in general to have been well preserved. As yet no effort has been made to ascertain whether any information about the poet could be derived from these sources. It is hardly necessary to say that the work of exploration could only be done by a competent scholar on the spot, who had the co-operation of the officials in charge.

The second chapter, while independent of the first, is in a certain sense its complement. It is the legendary biography which grew up about Chaucer, and for a long time held sway as a narrative of real events. Its details are still of a good deal of importance, because some of them continue to be widely accepted and represented as true. At a comparatively early period there was the skeleton of a real life of Chaucer in existence. In time, however, it came to be clothed with everything that inference could draw, or conjecture suggest, or invention



fabricate. I have in this chapter followed the story into all its ramifications, not merely to show the nature of the misstatements made, but also the time when, the place where, and the circumstances under which they originated. For this legendary story is not in the least traditional, though parts of it have been frequently so termed. Traditions about Chaucer there are none. Even did they exist, they would not be entitled to much respect. We who, in modern times, have come to learn how little reliance there is to be placed upon history are not likely to stand in much awe of tradition; naturally in none at all of supposed tradition. For the particular legendary story told in this chapter is not a survival that has somehow reached us from a past in which its sources are lost. It is perfectly recognizable as a manufacture of the human intellect, and the places where it had its origin and the persons to whom it owed it can be definitely pointed out. The first life of Chaucer ever written—the production in the sixteenth century of the antiquary Leland—is the original source from which no slight portion of it derived its being. As that biography is none too accessible now even in its Latin form, it is here presented for the first time in an English translation. The discussion of the legend of Chaucer's flight and imprisonment necessitated also an examination in this chapter of the genuineness of the 'Testament of Love,' though it properly belongs to another part of the work.

The chapter that follows consists first of a discussion of the general and special dangers that threatened the integrity of the text of Chaucer during the period when its preservation was entirely in the hands of the scribes.

After the introduction of printing an account is given of the text, and of the changes it underwent in the various editions of Thynne, Stow, Speght, Urry, Morell, Tyrwhitt, Wright, Bell, and Morris, down to the publication of the Six-text edition of the Chaucer Society. It has been out of my province to make any criticism upon recent editions, several of which are of great excellence. But the examination of those mentioned above shows definitely the nature and extent of the attempts made in the past to establish the text, and the account of what has been done enables us to gain a very definite idea of what still remains to be done.

The fourth of these monographs is taken up with an attempt to ascertain precisely and fix definitely what the genuine writings of Chaucer are. Without taking into account the existing translation of the *Roman de la Rose*, there are nearly twenty thousand lines which once found a place among the poet's works, but are now reckoned either spurious or doubtful. Much the larger part of these no longer appears in modern editions. It has been my aim in this chapter to present clearly, in the first place, the nature of the evidence by which the genuineness or spuriousness of a work bearing the name of Chaucer as its author can be tested. This is followed by a list of every production, long or short, which has ever been attributed to him on any responsible authority. The time when it made its first appearance in print is stated, as well as the place where. The reasons also, when known, are given that led to its being included among the poet's works in the first instance, and likewise those for rejecting it afterwards, in case it were rejected.

With a single exception, therefore, not only everything that Chaucer wrote, but everything that has at any time been ascribed to him in any edition of his works, either in whole or in part, can be found recorded and examined in the first section of this monograph. It concludes with a discussion of the productions that are still included in modern editions, but in them are put down as doubtful.

The single exception just referred to remains now to be mentioned. The second section of this monograph is taken up entirely with a discussion of the genuineness of the 'Romance of the Rose.' The conclusions I have reached in this matter will strike most Chaucer scholars as the rankest of heresies. It is proper for me, therefore, to say that at first I accepted without hesitation, though without examination, the orthodox faith. In consequence, I was not intending to devote to the consideration of this version but five or six pages at the outside. The more familiar, however, that repeated perusal made me with Chaucer's undisputed writings, the more thoroughly I studied this particular poem in conjunction with its French original, the more doubtful I became of the truth of the received opinion. Doubt finally ended in disbelief. The reasons given for the change of view will be found fully stated in the section itself. They must stand or fall upon their own merits, and it is not impossible that the facts and arguments which have borne conviction to my own mind may not impress others so forcibly. It can hardly be expected, indeed, that conclusions which are in direct opposition to those to which most Chaucer scholars stand com-



mitted should meet with much favor at the outset. Still, I am confident that those who dissent will also concede that every objection which has been brought against the genuineness of this translation has been given with perfect fairness, even if its importance has not, according to their view, been fully recognized.

Since this section was written, however, and, indeed, since it has been in press, there has been something of a change of ground on the part of those who deny the connection of Chaucer with the existing version of the *Roman de la Rose*. It is now not so much the genuineness of the translation as a whole that is disputed as the genuineness of certain portions of it; or perhaps it would be better to say that a tendency exists to concede the genuineness of a certain portion. Here I have only space to record my conviction that this view is much more untenable than that which denies the genuineness of the translation altogether. Owing to the lateness with which it has been put forth, it has been made the subject of only a few references in this work. Still, the evidence presented, though not intended for that particular purpose, seems to me sufficient to show the indefensibility of any such position.

So much space was unexpectedly, and at the last moment, given up to the discussion of the genuineness of the 'Romance of the Rose'—the less than six pages contemplated having swelled to one hundred and sixty-six—that it became necessary to discard the section which had been intended to constitute the third part of the chapter on the writings of Chaucer. This was the discussion of the probable order and date of his produc-

tions. The matter prepared was laid aside with the less reluctance because the more closely attention was paid to the subject, the more unsatisfactory seemed any results that could be obtained. There are a few general statements that can be made safely about the time of the appearance of the poet's works. The nearer assertions approach the specific, the farther they depart from certainty. It is easy to expose the insecurity of the foundations upon which many current theories are based. It is not easy to substitute anything more satisfactory in their place. Without entering into details, it may be said that, with the possession of no positive knowledge on the part of either, a broad line of demarcation exists between the earlier and the later biographers. Within a comparatively short period of time there has been a general forward movement of dates, consequent upon the adoption of 1340 as the year of Chaucer's birth, instead of 1328. The incorrectness of the latter is now ascertained beyond doubt. So far there has been a slight gain. But accuracy of knowledge is not essentially advanced by the substitution of a date which we do not know to be true for a date which we know to be untrue. Still, these excursions into the realms of the unknowable will always have an attraction, especially as the same lack of certain evidence which prevents the positions secured from being established by proof is equally useful in preventing them from being overthrown by disproof. As there have been many to make these excursions in the past, and will be many more to make them in the future, the account of my own can well be spared.

The subject of the fifth monograph is the accuracy and extent of Chaucer's learning. In it I have sought to include every author with any of whose works we have reason to suppose the poet was acquainted. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first is concerned only with the writers of ancient or modern times who are still read by students of literature, or at least by students of special literatures. The second section includes writers almost unknown, nearly all of them belonging to the Middle Ages. In it I have taken pains to give not only a slight account of these obscure authors themselves, but also some general idea of the works written by them which Chaucer read; for comparatively few students of the poet can have the opportunity, even if they have the desire, to undergo the penitential, or rather penitentiary, labor which is involved in obtaining a knowledge of the contents of these productions by actual perusal.

It was not merely for the light which it threw upon the attainments of the poet himself that the investigation was made; the results of which are contained in this chapter. It was also to give some sort of conception of the nature of the reading-matter, as well as its extent, that would appeal to a man of the fourteenth century, possessed as was Chaucer of literary and scholarly tastes—the kind of library such a person would have, on the assumption that he had any library at all. From that point of view these works have an interest of their own, independent of any interest connected with him. It will be seen from the catalogue given that the reading of Chaucer was varied in its character, and that his in-



tellectual diet was very far from being limited to the hundred best books. Indeed, if lists are ever to be made up of the hundred worst, several with which he was familiar would present strong claims to be included, at least if tediousness be reckoned a recommendation for a place. Though I have labored to make the catalogue complete, so far as it can be made, there may be in the poet's writings references to works which have been here passed by without notice, and even passages taken from them which may have escaped my attention. Details are therefore likely to be subject to more or less of modification in the future. Still, I am confident that very few productions with which Chaucer can be proved to be familiar have been overlooked; certainly not a number of them sufficient to overthrow, or even seriously to invalidate, the conclusions reached as to the extent of his learning, different as is the estimate given from that commonly expressed.

The title of the sixth chapter sufficiently explains the nature of its contents. It is an effort, in the first place, to show Chaucer's precise relation to the English language, about which many contradictory statements continue to be made; in the second place, to ascertain what is the most probable view to be taken of the nature of his religious opinions.

The subject of the seventh monograph is the history of Chaucer's literary reputation. It is in no sense a collection of the references that have been made to him or to his writings during the five hundred years that have gone by since his death. This is a valuable work to do, but it is not one that has been attempted here. Most

of the large number of these references that have come under my own observation during the preparation of this work, so far from being quoted in it, have not received so much as an allusion. Those that have been inserted in the text have been introduced for no other purpose than to illustrate some point, or to furnish confirmatory evidence of the truth of some position that has been taken. The chapter is strictly what it purports to be—a history of the poet's reputation, the changes it has undergone at different periods, and the agencies that have operated at different times to elevate it or depress it. As there has never been any previous attempt in the case of Chaucer to produce a systematic treatise of the kind, the present one may suffer from the imperfection that almost inevitably attends all pioneer undertakings. Nothing, however, has been consciously neglected that would contribute to its completeness.

The final chapter is a critical study of Chaucer's art, and of the attitude which he himself occupied towards it. In it I have gone a little outside of the strict limits of the subject, for the sake of combating an apparently widespread impression that it was impossible for an idea to enter the poet's brain without having taken a preliminary journey through the brain of some one else. With this exception, the title of the chapter indicates accurately its general character.

This slight summary of the contents of the work is sufficient to show that the several chapters are, as has been stated, independent of each other. For the sake of readers who might be interested in but a single one of the subjects discussed, it was desirable that this

should be the case. The accomplishment of the object has, however, been attended with one difficulty. It necessarily involved to some extent the repetition of the same facts, and in a very few cases of the same ideas. Still, while these repetitions certainly exist, I have taken pains to present what is told a second time in a new and different light, so that the recurrence of the same statements need not be offensive to those who have to examine more than one, or even all, of these essays.

It will be observed, also, that in most instances the extracts that are introduced from Chaucer's writings appear in our present spelling. The reasons for adopting this course will be found at the end of the seventh chapter. It is almost unnecessary to add that I have not the slightest expectation that what is said there will be regarded as satisfactory by a large number of special students of the poet. I remember too well my own state of mind when the proposal to put Chaucer's writings into modern orthography was first suggested, to be inclined to find fault with any similar exhibition of agony on the part of others, or to feel resentment for any opprobrious terms in which their indignation finds expression. All that is needful to say here is, that a method of reading Chaucer without difficulty is given for the benefit of those who are entirely unfamiliar with his poetry in its earlier garb. This is usually accomplished by the use of two characters. The grave (``) indicates pronunciation simply. A vowel or a syllable over which it is placed is to be pronounced as a separate syllable with a light accent. The acute (') indicates



stress of voice. The syllable upon which it falls may or may not receive an accent heavy in itself, but it receives one that is heavier than what it would ordinarily have under our present system of pronunciation. As an illustration of these uses, the words *timè* and *stonès* would be pronounced as words of two syllables. Again, *natìon* and *creàtùre* would appear as words of three syllables. In the former the vowel *i* would make a distinct syllable, in the latter the vowel *a*. In both instances the final syllables *on* and *ure* would be more heavily accented than at present. These distinctions can be mastered in a minute, and by paying heed to them there will not be found the slightest difficulty on the part of any one in preserving the harmony of the lines of Chaucer which are cited in this work.

No one, furthermore, who takes the pains to read a single one of these eight monographs will fail to discover that on several points the views here expressed are not the views generally entertained by Chaucer scholars. So many of them, indeed, are opposed to the accepted belief that not only must they necessarily encounter much adverse comment and criticism, but their very number will suggest the suspicion that these differences are due to the love of paradox rather than of truth. This possible interpretation of motives must be the apology for saying that in every instance the conclusions reached have been reached only after the fullest study that could be given to the subject. Whether correct or incorrect, they have in no case been adopted unadvisedly. In the preparation of the work I have sedulously striven to accomplish two things. One is,

that all the facts and arguments that make against the views here adopted, if opposed to the general belief, shall be as adequately presented as those which make for them. The other is, that the facts of every kind shall be absolutely accurate; that confidence shall be felt in their correctness, even by those who deny the inferences that have been drawn from them in any given case. In the immense number of details found in these various monographs, it is perhaps hopeless to expect that errors will not be detected. I have faith to believe that there will not be many of them. If they do occur on any serious scale, the plea of indifference cannot be put forward as an excuse for their appearance, nor of carelessness, nor of haste, nor of the momentary inattention which at times overtakes the most painstaking. They will be due to nothing but genuine unalloyed ignorance.

But though I have been compelled to dissent on many points from the views of some of the foremost Chaucer scholars, I am far from wishing to be understood as underrating the services they have rendered to the study of the poet, or the obligations I am under personally to their exertions. He who has spent much time in investigations of this sort, in which but little is certain, will least of all fail to appreciate how much of his knowledge of that little which is certain is due to the labors of others. In particular, in the course of this work, while more often agreeing, I have frequently disagreed with conclusions reached by Furnivall, by Ten Brink, and by Skeat. Even in so doing I am indebted to them. The arguments with which their

opinions have been controverted have in many instances been drawn from the materials which they themselves have supplied. It would be nothing but a source of regret if anything here said could or should be looked upon as inconsistent with the profound respect which I feel for their attainments, or the thorough appreciation I have of the work they have accomplished. It is, indeed, almost needless for me to say that without the publications of the Chaucer Society, which owes its existence to the unselfish zeal of the first-named scholar, much of this work could never have been written at all.

A small portion of what is contained in these volumes—not amounting in all to a score of pages—has previously appeared in the columns of the ‘Atlantic Monthly’ and the ‘Nation.’ It remains to express my obligations to many friends who during the preparation of this work have aided me with suggestions and information. Acknowledgment in particular is due to Prof. C. D. Vail, of Hobart College, N. Y., who is responsible for the preparation of the Table of Contents and of the Index.

The portrait of Chaucer is engraved from the Chaucer Society’s reproduction of the portrait on leaf 91 of Occleve’s *De Regimine Principum*, Harleian MS. 4866.



# CHAUCE

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## THE LIFE OF CHAUCE

IF the interest taken in the lives of men of letters can be deemed proof of the estimate in which letters themselves are held, the present age may fairly assume that in no previous one has the profession of literature been so widely and so highly appreciated. Biography in ancient times, so far as it existed at all, concerned itself almost exclusively with heroes and kings, with statesmen and warriors. In modern times it long continued to follow essentially the same lines. The universal interest in religion and crime gradually added to the list of favorite subjects saints and divines on the one side, highwaymen and murderers on the other. It is only within a recent period in the world's history that the lives of authors have received even from authors themselves the courtesy of the scantiest consideration. This is true alike of the attention paid to the greatest as well as to the smallest among their number. Everything that we know with certainty about all the most celebrated writers of antiquity could be comprehended in the com-

pass of a few pages. Into the same space could be crowded everything that we know about the most celebrated writers of English literature who flourished before the seventeenth century. It would hardly be amiss to extend the assertion so as to include those who flourished before the eighteenth. About several of them, indeed, bulky volumes have been produced. But the size of these volumes is often due not so much to our knowledge as to our lack of it. What we call the lives of our earlier authors consists in most cases of little else than the discussion of disputed points that can never be settled, the weighing of probabilities where certainty can never be assured, or, if nothing better offers, the relation of events in which they have borne, or may have borne, a part.

That such a condition of things should have existed in the past may not upon reflection seem strange in itself, however alien it may be to feelings and practices now prevalent. It is not to be expected that the story of a man whose life has been passed in study, or what passes for study, can ordinarily equal in interest for the majority of readers the story of him whose life has been passed in action. This would certainly be true in ages when battle and conquest were regarded as the only things worth chronicling, and princes and soldiers the only persons worth mentioning. At such a period the career of a writer, usually uneventful, had in it hardly enough of incident to arrest the attention. No records of him, in consequence, were apt to be handed down. While the memory of the man was fresh they were not felt to be needed. When the generation that knew him

had passed away they could not be secured. This accounts, in a measure, for the imperfect and unsatisfactory character of the information we possess about early authors. But it does not account for it wholly. It does not explain the absolute failure, in some instances, to transmit the slightest notice of who and what they were or of anything which they did. To this negative result another cause contributed. Eminent men of letters were simply the worst sufferers from a neglect from which all men of eminence suffered. Biography was not a favorite method of composition in the past. Few lives of any sort were then written, and none were written on a large scale.

On the other hand, the present is peculiarly and increasingly an age of biography. Nothing remotely approaching it in this respect has ever before been known in the literary history of the race. No station is too obscure to escape observation, no achievement is too petty to be passed over without fullest mention. In the case of famous men, the work of recording their lives is done over and over again. But the practice is far from being limited to this comparatively small number. Modern biography, in its quest of material, has taken literally unto itself the command contained in the parable. For the entertainment it provides, it goes out into the highways and hedges to seek its subjects, and fairly compels them to come in. Naturally upon a man of eminence its eyes are sedulously fixed. It lies in wait for its victim's hour of death, and too often anticipates the grave. The spirit which dictates this course has now become so wide-spread that it is no easy matter for us to compre-



hend how thoroughly modern is the taste of which it has been begotten. Especially is this true of the accounts of men of letters. Three hundred years ago their lives were not written at all. One hundred years ago they were written very rarely. The death of Pope in 1744 marks the beginning of that eruption of biographical detail about authors which is one of the most distinctive peculiarities of our existing literary production. He had not been laid in his grave a month when two catch-penny accounts of his career were brought out, and within a year they were followed by an elaborate biography extending to two volumes. Something similar to this, but on a much grander scale, is now the regular proceeding. It is so even in the case of writers who do not occupy a specially exalted position. But the practice was not only unprecedented then; it was a long time before it became common. Of the lives of most of its eminent men of letters, the eighteenth century has left us no satisfactory account whatever, while during the greater part of it not a single notorious criminal was led to the gallows without having the career thus summarily closed detailed in full to an eager and interested public.

The taste for biography was accordingly prevalent, though literary biography was not the kind to which it was directed. It was merely a question of time, however, when its attention should be turned to that quarter. That it would eventually do so there were many signs to indicate by the middle of the eighteenth century. Towards the end of it there is plenty of evidence that it had already done so largely. The growth of in-

terest in the lives and acts of men of letters was significantly denoted by the number of memoirs of Dr. Johnson, and of publications bearing upon his character and career that speedily followed upon his death in 1784, as contrasted with the number to which the death of Pope had given birth forty years previously. The increase bore unmistakable testimony to the fact that the attitude of mind of the reading world was changing rapidly. The difference in this particular between the past and the present has been made more emphatic, instead of less, with the progress of time. Numerous as are now the various kinds of personal achievement or celebrity which appeal to the taste for biography, it is upon the whole the man of letters that takes the lead in this respect of the members of any profession. It is about him and his words and acts that the curiosity of the public is most permanently, if not most keenly, aroused. In particular he has completely displaced in popularity those who, in former times, had the field almost exclusively to themselves. The saints who hoped to secure eternal happiness by making themselves miserable, the warriors who sought to secure eternal glory by making others miserable, the malefactors who gained temporary notoriety by the boldness or atrocity of their crimes, are no longer the ones who excite the deepest interest in that body of cultivated readers, whether great or little, which concerns itself with the lives and fortunes of others. To this supreme position it is the author that has attained. For those of the number who dislike notoriety it unquestionably has its annoyances. The man of letters suffers now from too much attention as once he did from too

much neglect. He is felt to have no rights which the seeker after personal information is bound to respect. His conversations are reported, his letters are published. He is not granted the poor privilege of suppressing the crude and hasty productions of which he has become ashamed. Nothing that he says, nothing that he does, is allowed to be forgotten. He who in the course of time sets out to give an impartial account of the character and career of the man is not hindered by the scarcity of his material. He is hampered rather by its abundance.

I have spent so much time in bringing out the difference between the ancient and modern spirit on the subject of biography at the outset of a chapter ostensibly devoted to a life of Chaucer, in order to make clear and prominent both the fact and the reason of the fact that no life of Chaucer can be written in the proper sense of the word. So far as regards most of the details which the reader now expects in a work of this character, it cannot be written at all. For that the materials are almost entirely lacking. In this respect his fortune is in no way peculiar. It does not vary essentially from that of all writers who have preceded him and of many that have followed him. While he lived he was regarded by his contemporaries as the chief poet of Britain. Men admired him, men imitated him; they strove to reproduce in their own work the manner and spirit of the master they loved. They were never weary of celebrating his praises, and the tributes paid to his greatness are couched in language of warmest eulogy and sometimes of fairly affectionate devotion. The one thing they neglected



to do entirely was to give an account of his life, and even of the most insignificant detail belonging to it or connected with it. No contemporary writer has preserved for us a single anecdote. No contemporary chronicle contains a single saying or reports a single fact. The appreciation which gladly recognized Chaucer as standing at the head of all living English poets never, to our knowledge, inspired a solitary disciple to place upon record the slightest particular in the story of his career. His superiority remained unchallenged during the century that followed his death. Yet no account of him on even the most insignificant scale was even attempted till after he had been in his grave almost a hundred and fifty years. Nothing could show more pointedly how alien was the spirit of the past to that of the present. The light from all sources that beats upon the modern author makes intenser by contrast the darkness that shades the life and character of the first great poet of our literature. None of the agencies now sedulously put forth to acquire a knowledge of a man's deeds or misdeeds existed then; or if they existed imperfectly, they had few means in the age of manuscript of spreading or of preserving and perpetuating the information or misinformation they had secured. At him the reporter did not dart his poisoned arrow by day; for him the interviewer did not walk by night; nor did the biographer stand by the side of the still open grave with his completed record of the life that had barely ceased to live.

It is evident from this survey that no information about Chaucer's life has come down to us because of his

position as a poet. For any acquaintance we have with a single incident in his career we are not indebted to the interest, great as it unquestionably was, which his writings inspired. Were our knowledge of him derived from sources purely literary we should hardly dare to hazard any assertion about him beyond the mere fact of his existence. The scanty information we actually possess comes from another and altogether distinct quarter. For Chaucer was something besides an author. He was a government official, a soldier, a diplomatist. He held offices of trust and responsibility. In his capacity as a man of affairs there are constant references made to him that would never have been made had he lived merely the life of a man of letters. These references are found in legal and official documents—writings that stand at the furthest possible remove from literature proper. They are necessarily imperfect and barren. They give the titles of the appointments he received, they fix precisely the date of certain events, they make known journeys that he made, they record moneys paid to him or disbursed by him in the various duties to which he was assigned. Of the man himself, however, they tell us nothing directly. They have, moreover, a danger of their own. In these documents persons with his family name turn up not unfrequently. There are Chaucers and Chaucers. There is, in truth, no small number of them in the fourteenth century. While, therefore, every reference to Geoffrey Chaucer that has been found points pretty certainly to the poet, there does exist the possibility that there may be another man with the same name to whom some of these entries apply. The prob-

ability is all another way; still, that possibility is something that ought never to be forgotten or ignored.

The details which laborious research has succeeded in extracting from official records of various kinds furnish us everything essentially that we know of Chaucer's life; but there are several long periods, as well as numerous short ones, for which even the meagre information obtained from these sources is not available. A good deal of this information, moreover, has been brought to light within the present century, and particularly within the last twenty-five years. It could not, therefore, serve as an aid or a check to the earlier biographers, who naturally strove to fill in the gaps in their knowledge by the liberal employment of conjecture. The legendary history which, in consequence, gradually grew up about the poet's life and writings, and which still manifests much of the vitality that belongs to well-accredited falsehood, will demand for its consideration a chapter of its own. In this one, attention will be confined to the few details that are certain, and the many controversies that have arisen from their fewness; for, unhappily, the scantiness of the material for the poet's life does not involve a corresponding brevity in its treatment. On the contrary, it is to this very scantiness, and the obscurity occasioned by it, that it owes whatever amplitude it may attain. The biography of Chaucer is built upon doubts and thrives upon perplexities. Without these there would be exceedingly little to say. Uncertainty begins with the date of his birth, it hovers over most of his career, and adds to the length of the narrative as inevitably as it detracts from its interest. About some of the facts



the evidence is conflicting; about others that cannot be questioned there is conflict of opinion as to their interpretation. In consequence, he who sets out to gain a knowledge of the poet's life enters at once into an arena of controversy, and of controversy that can usually never be carried to a satisfactory conclusion because of the absence of satisfactory data. For this very reason the discussion is apt to be as exciting to the disputant as it is dull to the reader. Yet, though in a large number of instances we are forbidden to expect a final settlement of the points in question, it is always desirable and often important to learn in what direction the weight of evidence lies. At any rate, it is largely in the details of these controversies that the biography of Chaucer, or what goes under that name, consists. In the following pages will accordingly be found fully stated the little we positively know of the poet's life, and fairly stated, it is hoped, the arguments for the conflicting views that have been taken of matters about which we do not know with certainty, and in most cases are never likely to know.

Geoffrey Chaucer was the son of John Chaucer, vintner, of London. This parentage was first suggested as the probable one by the antiquary John Dart, in the life prefixed to the edition of the poet's works which appeared in 1721. With him, however, it was mainly a matter of inference; but the discovery of a legal document in 1873 settled the point beyond dispute. This was a deed which bears the date of June 19, 1380. In it Chaucer described himself as the son of John Chaucer, vintner, of London, and released all his rights in his father's former house in Thames Street to Henry Herbury,

vintner, by whom it was then occupied.<sup>1</sup> Other records show that the Christian name of John Chaucer's wife was Agnes. In a deed of 1369 she is called the kinswoman and heiress<sup>2</sup> of Hamo de Compton, sometime citizen and moneyer of London. The date of her marriage is unknown, nor can we say positively that her husband had never been married before; but legal papers are in existence in which as early as 1349 this Agnes appears as the wife of John Chaucer, and there is little occasion for doubting that she was the poet's mother.

These official documents enable us to make some further definite statements about the poet's family. John Chaucer was the son of Robert le Chaucer, and was born about 1310. In August of that year his father was appointed one of the collectors of the port of London of the new customs upon wines granted by the merchants of Aquitaine. It is accordingly worthy of note that the grandfather held a position in the civil service in connection with the port of London somewhat similar to that, though not the same as that, held more than a half-century later by his famous grandson. The Christian name of the grandmother was Mary. She was three times married. Her first husband was a certain Heyroun, to whom she bore a son called Thomas. The second was the above-mentioned Robert le Chaucer, the father of John. The third was Richard Chaucer, in all proba-

<sup>1</sup> Communicated to the London *Athenæum* November 29, 1873, by F. J. Furnivall, by whom or through whom most of the facts in connection with Chaucer's family have been

brought to light. In the *Athenæum* of December of the same year the name of John Chaucer's wife is first given.

<sup>2</sup> "*Consanguinea et heres*" is the phrase used.

bility a kinsman of the previous husband.<sup>1</sup> Though the family name has the meaning of "shoemaker," nearly all its members, as well as the Heyrouns, seem to have been vintners by occupation. They were, at least, connected with the Vintners' Company. They also seem to have had something of a connection with the court. On the 12th of June, 1338, a protection, to last till Christmas Day, was granted to John Chaucer, with some forty-five others, who were crossing the seas with the King and in the service of the King. It is perhaps of sufficient interest to note that among this number appears the name of one of the Heyroun family.<sup>2</sup>

As John Chaucer is described in these records as a citizen of London, it is a fair presumption that the poet was born in that place. Still, while the probabilities are all in favor of such a view, there is no actual proof that can be adduced of the fact. The dwelling in Thames Street, which he mentioned as having belonged to his father, was by Wallbrook, a stream which took its rise in the fens beyond Moorgate, but like several other neighboring tributaries of the Thames has now left no trace of itself beyond the street to which it has given its name, and the depression through which it once flowed. The house was, therefore, almost equally distant from the Tower and from St. Paul's Cathedral, and must have been in or near the centre of London life in days when the City, not as now the commercial heart of the world, was still the chosen home of men and women. But the

<sup>1</sup> This and various other facts in regard to John Chaucer were first pointed out by Walter Rye, in a communication to the *London Ath-*

*enæum* for January 29, 1881.

<sup>2</sup> Rymer's *Fœdera*, vol. ii., part ii., p. 1042.



uncertainty attaching to the place of Chaucer's birth has almost the appearance of certainty when contrasted with that attaching to the date. He died in 1400. Of that fact there can be no reasonable doubt. But the moment we touch the time when he was born we enter at once upon one of those disputed points the discussion of which, in the lack of other satisfactory material, makes up no small share of what we call the life of the poet. Yet it is a question deserving the fullest examination, nor in certain aspects is it easy to overestimate its importance. Upon the view taken of the probable time of birth depends in large measure the view taken of Chaucer's literary development, and of the periods when he wrote, or may have written, his works. The controversy has generally been limited to two dates. On the one side the year in which the poet was born is put down as 1328; on the other as 1340. The former of these, as will be seen later, cannot be correct; but in the discussion of the matter it may be temporarily permitted to stand as the representative of an earlier period than that assumed by those who maintain that he was born in the later.

Before examining the special point under consideration, it is well to state that, until within a comparatively few years, this date of 1328 has been the one almost universally accepted. It is even still spoken of as the traditional one, and that, too, by those who deny its correctness. It is rather an abuse of language to call it traditional. It is not mentioned by the earliest writers, who give accounts, such as they are, of the poet's career. The antiquary Leland, who, near the middle of

the sixteenth century, produced the first life of Chaucer ever written, merely said that he reached the period of gray hairs, and found at last old age to be his greatest enemy. Neither he nor those who copied from him made any reference whatever to the year of his birth. Nor does the date of 1328 rest upon any statement contained in the inscription upon the poet's tombstone. This, to be sure, is an assertion which has been frequently made, and is, indeed, apparently sanctioned by an authority usually so trustworthy as Tyrwhitt. That inscription gives the year and month and day of Chaucer's death, but says nothing whatever about his age or birth—a *prima facie* proof that nothing certain was known. Nor, again, is 1328 specifically mentioned in the earliest account of the poet that was written in the English tongue. This was the brief biography prefixed to the collection of his works that appeared in 1598 under the editorship of Thomas Speght. Yet there is little question that here is to be found the source of the long prevalent belief. In this sketch of his life Speght said expressly that "Geoffrey Chaucer departed out of this world the twenty-fifth day of October, in the year of our Lord 1400, after he had lived about seventy-two years." He then went on to give as the authority for this statement the remark of Leland that has just been cited. The reference to it, moreover, is introduced in such a way as to lead naturally to the conclusion that the specific assertion of the later biographer was based mainly, if not wholly, upon what was said in a general way by his predecessor. But no matter from what quarter Speght obtained his information, it was accepted as

final by all writers who followed. The subtraction of seventy-two from fourteen hundred was an arithmetical problem that presented no difficulty, though as a matter of fact the operation was apparently not performed till more than a century after. The actual mention of 1328 as the year of Chaucer's birth occurs first, so far as I can discover, in the life prefixed to the edition of his works which bears the name of Urry. This came out in 1721, Since that time the assertion has been common enough. But it certainly seems a violent stretch of language to call a statement traditional which was never made even by implication till two hundred years after the death of the man to whom it referred; and which, moreover, was never made directly till more than another hundred years had gone by after it had been made by implication.

For 1328 of the old biographies we now find 1340 often substituted. As the official document which led to the adoption of this latter date was not published till early in the present century, it is only within the present century that this view can be found taken at all. Nor is it until within the past thirty years that it has become general. It is true that sporadic statements that Chaucer was probably born about 1340 occur earlier.<sup>1</sup> But they were too few in number, and they came from sources of too little influence to make much impression. But this state of things has of late been sig-

<sup>1</sup> "Born about the year 1328, or, in the opinion of some biographers, nearer 1340."—Gray (*Wm.*): *Origin and Progress of English Prose Literature*, Oxford, 1835, p. 38.

Gray's statement was probably founded upon Sharon Turner's account of Chaucer in his 'History of England during the Middle Ages.'

nally reversed. Nothing new has been brought forward. The facts remain as they were known and accepted fifty years ago. The point of view, however, has changed entirely. In most of the recent authorities, and in all of the best of them, 1340 appears as the date of the poet's birth. It was first put forward merely as an approximation to the date. But repetition has produced its natural results. In many lately published works 1340 has been stated, without qualification, as the very year in which Chaucer was born. It becomes, therefore, of importance at this point to set in clear and sharp contrast the arguments which are used by the advocates respectively of the later and of the earlier period. Let us begin with the former as the one now generally assumed to be correct. What are the facts that have led to the selection of 1340 as the date of the poet's birth? What is the line of reasoning by which this choice is supported?

In 1804 William Godwin brought out a life of Chaucer. To it he appended an extract from some court proceedings which had been previously noted in the biography prefixed to the edition of 1721, but apparently without a thought of any importance attaching to it beyond the fact that it proved the poet to have served for a while in the army. The part printed was the testimony given by Chaucer in a controversy between Sir Richard le Scrope and Sir Robert Grosvesnor, as to the right to use certain armorial bearings. The case was one of considerable celebrity at the time, and, on account of the nature of the dispute, was one of special interest to the members of the nobility. The trial came off in 1386 before a military court, which sat at West-



minster. Chaucer was summoned as a witness, and on the 12th of October was examined. His evidence, as it is given on the roll, is introduced in the following way:

“Geoffrey Chaucer, of the age of forty years and more, having borne arms for twenty-seven years, produced on the part of Sir Richard le Scrope, sworn and examined.”<sup>1</sup>

The document then goes on to give the questions asked of the poet, and the answers made by him; but these have little further pertinence, so far as this matter is concerned.

Here is a plain and definite statement made by Chaucer himself that in 1386 he was forty years of age and more, or, as the original is generally rendered, forty years and upwards. Had he been born in 1328 he would then have been fifty-eight years old. It is hardly conceivable that a man at that period of life would be represented by himself as being merely upwards of forty, or would even be so described by others. Circumstances, moreover, connected with the further statement that he had borne arms for twenty-seven years, point pretty clearly to a date for his birth later than 1328. Let us assume that forty years and upwards means forty-six, and that in consequence he was born in 1340. This would make him enter the military service in 1359, when he was nineteen years of age. This is itself a natural period. The occasion for entering the service

<sup>1</sup> “Geffray Chaucere, Esquier, del mons. Richard Lescrope, jurrez et age de xl. ans et plus, armeez par examinez.”  
xxvii. ans, produit pur la partie de

then is also known. It was in 1359 that Edward III. made in person his last invasion of France after three years of truce. In this expedition we know, from his own statements in this very deposition, that Chaucer was personally concerned, and that in the course of it he was taken prisoner. All these facts, resting upon positive evidence, agree satisfactorily with 1340 as the assumed date of birth. That Godwin, who first printed this testimony, did not himself assent to the inference to which it almost inevitably led, is a matter of no consequence in the present discussion. The deposition did not come into his hands till his work had been nearly all written and partly printed. To accept a date for Chaucer's birth much later than 1328 would have rendered it necessary for him to recast the whole biography, and throw aside no small share of it. This would, indeed, have been no loss to the world; but it would have been asking too much of human nature to expect that he himself should take that view.

This is not all. In 1873 Mr. Bond, then keeper of the additional manuscripts in the British Museum, found by accident fragmentary leaves of a household account of Lionel of Antwerp, the third son of Edward III. It covered the period between 1356 and 1359. In it the name of Geoffrey Chaucer occurs three times in connection with gifts of clothing and necessities. Mr. Bond, in communicating this information to the public, took pains to show that the person mentioned was the poet himself, and not some one else of the same name. This, indeed, there is no ground for doubting. The entries in the document make it certain that Chaucer was

attached to the household of Prince Lionel in some capacity. What that capacity was is not there given. But in Mr. Bond's opinion it was a probable conjecture, from the value of the articles furnished him, that he held the position of a page.<sup>1</sup> If he were born in 1340 this would make him in his seventeenth year when his connection with the court first becomes to us a matter of positive knowledge. His passage to military service in 1359 would be a natural transition from the place he then held. This view is still further confirmed by the fact that Prince Lionel was with his father in the invasion of France undertaken that same year.

There is, besides, additional corroborating evidence for the date of 1340 in what Chaucer himself says. In the prologue to the Man of Law's tale, he refers to some of his own productions. The fact, in particular, is mentioned that

"In youth he made of Ceyx and Alcyone."

No poem of his with this title is extant. But the story of Ceyx and Alcyone is told with a good deal of fulness in the 'Book of the Duchess;' and this is the work generally conceded to be the one meant in the line just quoted. The 'Book of the Duchess' was written on the death of Blanche, wife of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. This event took place in 1369. The poem, therefore, could not have been composed earlier than that year. But Chaucer must then have been forty-one years old, if he were born in 1328. Is it reasonable to suppose that he would speak of a work

<sup>1</sup> *Fortnightly Review*, vol. vi., p. 28, August, 1873.

composed at that age as a production of his youth? On the other hand, let us assume that he was born in 1340. Is not the assertion found in the line quoted just such a one as a man advanced in life would naturally make?

These are the principal arguments which are still recognized as valid that were then given for the choice of the later date. Few will be found to deny their strength. If they cannot be seriously shaken, none will be found to deny their conclusiveness. Let us therefore turn to the reasoning by which they are met, and the considerations which are deemed of sufficient weight to justify the choice of an earlier year. Chaucer's own testimony is here, as in the case of the other side, of primary importance. If it is to be taken literally, if it is to be regarded as a definite statement coming from the poet himself, and meant to be definite, it practically settles the question. Under such a condition of things neither 1328, nor a year shortly subsequent, could possibly be the date of his birth. The arguments with which the advocates of an earlier as opposed to a later period attack the inferences drawn from this testimony, naturally take precedence, therefore, of those that in their opinion bear directly in favor of their own view. These arguments will, in consequence, be given first.

If the statement as to Chaucer's age is to be taken literally, it proves too much. In that case 1340 itself must be looked upon as too early a date. "Forty years and upwards" can mean forty-two, and perhaps forty-three, and in the loose language of common life as distinguished from that of judicial proceedings, might possibly be stretched to forty-four. To make it extend to forty-six,



however, is an abuse of speech that might not, perhaps, have been out of place in ampler antediluvian ages. But in these latter days, when the common limit of our years is threescore and ten, it is taking altogether too trivial an account of human life. It would, in truth, never have been originated or maintained by any one who had not a preconceived theory to support, to which such a use, or rather abuse, of words was essential. To Sir Harris Nicolas, most accurate and unimaginative of biographers, it never even occurred that upwards of forty could mean anything beyond forty-one. He consequently attached no weight to the statement, on the ground that, if received, it would be necessary to put down 1345 as the year of Chaucer's birth; and this was a date quite incompatible with other statements made by the poet, or with the facts known about him. Godwin, who first printed this testimony, was a biographer whose courage never flinched from any hypothesis, however strained. With all his ingenuity in making unaccommodating facts bend to theories, he still did not venture in his discussion of the question to make "forty years and upwards" mean a number beyond forty-four. To extend it to forty-six was an exploit reserved for the men of our day, who have been most vigorous in their denunciation of the guesses and unwarranted assertions of the earlier biographers.

To go still further. There is no real proof that this is Chaucer's statement of his own age. It does not occur in the testimony itself, but in the description of the witness which is given by the writer of the roll. How the latter got his information we are under no obliga-

tion to show. The poet must have known how old he was. A statement of the kind recorded, made in the nature of an answer, would indicate either that he did not know it, or that he did not wish to tell it. But let it be granted, for the sake of the argument, that it was taken from the lips of Chaucer himself. Even then the exact meaning to be attached to it must depend on the form of the question to which it was a reply. Much weight could not have been laid upon the inquiry if it were actually made. The very indefiniteness with which the age is given is practically conclusive proof upon this point. It is quite inconceivable that an intelligent and truthful witness in any judicial proceeding, when asked in precise terms how old he was, should make the vague answer of "forty years and upwards" when he meant forty-six. If he should venture to give a reply so evasive, we may be sure that it would never be received by any court, if the question of age was of the slightest importance. For it is not to be forgotten for a moment that in this particular discussion we have to consider the strict language of tribunals, and not the loose language of common life. Men there do not answer at random. Exceedingly suggestive, therefore, is the contrast between the indefiniteness with which the fact of age is indicated and the preciseness with which the time of military service is stated. This latter, in the investigation then going on, was an essential point. There is, consequently, no reason to distrust the absolute accuracy of the assertion about it contained in the roll.

If, therefore, it be conceded that the statement as to age came from Chaucer himself, it is a perfectly legiti-

mate supposition that the question asked was as vague as the reply received. To the demand if he were over forty years old, the expression made use of in the document would be a natural and satisfactory answer. If it be said that this is a strained interpretation, other parts of the roll itself dispose of this objection. Sir Harris Nicolas, who edited the proceedings of this trial, informs us that the poet's case was in no sense a peculiar or exceptional one. "The mistakes in the ages of the deponents on that occasion," he writes, "some of whom are stated to have been ten, and others even twenty years younger than they really were, prevents Chaucer's deposition from being conclusive on the point." It is noticeable that he does not say that these deponents were actually put down as younger than they were, but that they "are stated" so to have been. Professor Morley, in his recent work on the literature of the fourteenth century, has given us, however, the results of an examination of the ages of some of these witnesses. The instances he furnishes of variations between the statements of the roll and the real facts are sufficient of themselves to overthrow the value of any inference about the time of the poet's birth that has been derived from this particular record. "Sir George Bogan," he writes, "was entered at sixty '*et pluis*' when his age was over eighty. Sir Richard Bingham, aged sixty-six, was said to be fifty '*et pluis*.' Sir Robert Marny is said to have been fifty-two (without any '*pluis*'), and first armed at the relief of Sterling—that is to say, when he was two years old. Sir Bernard Brocas, when his age was really fifty-six, was said to be forty, while the record adds that he was first

armed at La Hogue, so that the roll itself represents him as having gone to the wars when he was not yet one year old. John Schakel also, said to be forty-five in 1386, and to have been first armed in the battle of Morlaix, must (if this record be decisive) have gone to the wars aged one."<sup>1</sup>

It may be true that in the case of most of these deponents the age has been accurately stated in the roll, and that those just given are the exception and not the rule. No evidence on that point has been presented either way, so far as I am aware. But the exceptions are numerous enough and important enough to impair any confidence in the application of the rule to Chaucer. No student, moreover, of ancient records, or, for that matter, of modern ones, needs to be told that, of all uncertain things, assertions in regard to age are the most uncertain. Accuracy upon this point seems to be the one topic about which men otherwise scrupulous manifest the utmost indifference. Chaucer himself furnishes us an illustration. If the 'Book of the Duchess' refers, as is generally conceded, to the wife of John of Gaunt, the poet has misstated the age of his hero, who was at the same time his friend and patron. He calls him twenty-four years of age when he was actually twenty-nine. In this inexactness, however, he is not in the least peculiar. Accuracy in dates might be expected on a tombstone if nowhere else. The facts there recorded are almost always contributed by relatives and friends who ought to know and have no motive to mislead. Yet experience amply demonstrates that an epitaph is

<sup>1</sup> Morley's *English Writers*, vol. v., p. 94, 1890.



a no more trustworthy certificate of age than it is of character. Errors in this matter are not limited to the case of obscure men or to insignificant burial-places. The monument erected in Westminster Abbey to Spenser in 1620 by Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, represented that poet as having been born in 1510, and as having died in 1596. He was actually born about 1552, and died in January, 1599. Even when, in 1770, these dates were corrected, they were not made correct. Congreve was within less than two months of sixty at the time of his death. The inscription on his monument in this same abbey declares him to have been then only fifty-six years old. The memorial in this case was set up by his intimate friend, Henrietta, Duchess of Marlborough, to whom he had bequeathed the bulk of his fortune. One other illustration will suffice. Dr. Johnson wrote the inscription on the cenotaph erected to Goldsmith's memory in Westminster Abbey. He was the intimate personal friend of the dead man; he had certainly ample opportunities for ascertaining the precise fact; yet he made a mistake of three years in the date of the birth, putting it in 1731 instead of 1728.

If reliance cannot be placed upon dates when stated with precision, still less confidence can be felt in their exactness when stated loosely, as in this Chaucer deposition. Upon the untrustworthiness of evidence of this sort antiquarian students can be said to be in agreement. "Round numbers in old records," says Walter Rye, "must be taken very generally. One instance of this will suffice. The inq. post mortem of Isabella de Cressy, in 48 Henry III. for Lincoln, describes her sister

as being 'sixty years and more,' while the similar inquisition for Norfolk says 'ninety years and more,' the latter being correct, as I know from other sources."<sup>1</sup> Facts like these—and they could easily be multiplied—forbid our giving any real weight to the statement about Chaucer's age contained in the extract cited from the roll. Nor does the argument based upon the fragments from the household accounts of Prince Lionel prove anything. We cannot, in the first place, be absolutely sure that the person mentioned in them is the poet. It is, in truth, significant of the shadowy nature of the evidence relied upon to establish the correctness of the date of 1340 that the very scholar who discovered and gave an account of these fragments based his conviction that the Geoffrey Chaucer whose name appears in this roll must be Geoffrey Chaucer the poet, because one particular production of the latter, entitled 'The Dream,' evinced intimate familiarity with the manners and customs of court life. An acquaintance with them, such as is shown in that piece, could have been gained only by actual service, and here the service is found. This very poem, however, which is now frequently and far more appropriately entitled 'The Isle of Ladies,' is no longer regarded by modern scholars as one with which Chaucer had anything whatever to do. Another reason which led Mr. Bond to think that Chaucer held the position of a page at this time, and must accordingly have been born about 1340, was that in his 'Court of Love' the poet spoke of himself as being eighteen years of age

<sup>1</sup> London *Athenæum*, January 29, 1881, p. 166.

when he set out to visit the abode of the goddess of Venus. On that occasion it was he met the woman with whom he fell in love and to whom he became betrothed. This would, therefore, harmonize exactly with a courtship belonging to the year 1358. Now, it is a striking coincidence that among the attendants of the wife of Prince Lionel was a certain Philippa. This was also the name of Chaucer's wife. To his courtship of her there may have been a veiled allusion in the poem. This, while admittedly conjectural, was nevertheless regarded as plausible evidence in favor of the 1340 date. But the 'Court of Love,' like 'The Dream,' is no longer reckoned among Chaucer's works by the very scholar who discovered this document. The value, accordingly, of inferences derived from anything contained in it falls at once to the ground. It is dangerous, indeed, to insist with positiveness upon any identification based wholly upon similarity of names. This process applied to another great English author once yielded novel results. Mr. John Payne Collier discovered, in the register of St. Clement Danes in the Strand, an entry under the year 1587, recording the baptism of a child named Florence, daughter of Edmund Spenser. On the strength of this discovery, he gave that poet a residence in London at a time when he was pretty certainly in Ireland, and furnished him with a wife seven years at least before he was actually married.

It would, accordingly, be no violent conjecture to suppose that among the many Chaucers we know to have been in existence in the fourteenth century, there may have been more than one who was christened Geoffrey.

The most strenuous advocate of the later date of birth would not declare this to be impossible. He who had no interest whatever in the controversy might be disposed to speak of it as not improbable. At the same time, no more is intended here than to make prominent the fact that this assumed identification does not partake of the nature of absolute certainty. Yet, in the lack of any evidence to the contrary, it is just and fair to take the ground that the Geoffrey Chaucer of the household roll is the poet. The burden of proof must unquestionably rest upon him who maintains any other view. In the existing condition of our knowledge we have a right to look upon the point as settled so long, assuredly, as not the slightest tittle of testimony to the contrary is forthcoming. But, while admitting it to be the fact, inferences have been drawn from it for which there is no sufficient justification. The document shows no more than that Chaucer was attached to the household of Prince Lionel in some capacity. It gives no information as to the nature of that capacity. The assertion that he was a page there, and consequently young, has nothing in its favor which can be called proof; it is hardly going too far to say that it has little which can be called testimony. It rests entirely upon the fact that the payments made to Chaucer on two different occasions were on a somewhat lower scale than those made to certain others. The "paltock," or short cloak, given to him in April, 1357, cost only four shillings, while for two other attendants the sums dispensed was respectively six shillings and eightpence, and eight shillings and threepence. His Christmas present of the same year for necessities



is put down at three shillings and sixpence, while some other members of the household receive thirteen shillings and eightpence and twenty shillings. On the strength of these payments the conclusion was drawn that Chaucer must have been younger than other persons in the service of the prince, and that being younger he was probably a page. This "probably" has in most modern notices of the poet become "certainly." No person ever received a position on much scantier evidence; for here has been given everything upon which his occupancy of such a post is based. The other arguments originally brought forward to support the claim were drawn from the poem just mentioned, called in old editions 'Chaucer's Dream.' It was partly to fit the period of this assumed pageship that the year 1340 was fixed upon as the date of Chaucer's birth.

Equally valueless is the argument derived from the assertion in the prologue to the Man of Law's tale that Chaucer in his youth had written about Ceyx and Alcyone. The supposition that by these words he meant the 'Book of the Duchess' is one of those violent ones that carry conviction only to those whose minds are already made up. The story of Ceyx and Alcyone, as we now have it, is a mere episode in the production in which it is found. It consists of but one hundred and fifty lines, while the poem which contains it extends to thirteen hundred and thirty-three. It is an extravagant conjecture that by this fragment Chaucer could mean the complete work, of which the episode is an essentially unrelated part—from which it could indeed be dropped without materially marring the course

of the narrative. No such strained interpretation is needed. If we must guess, we can do so far more plausibly. 'Ceyx and Alcyone' may be a poem which has perished, as we know that several of Chaucer's poems have perished. Or it may have been written by him in his earlier years, and a revision of it or an abridgment of it inserted in the 'Book of the Duchess.' Either one of these suppositions is less unreasonable than to confound it with a special poem, the main burden of which is on an entirely different subject. Moreover, the theory that Chaucer's birth belongs to the year 1340 lessens the impropriety of his speaking of a work written in 1369 as the composition of his youth, but it does not remove it. He must have reached extreme old age—and to that Chaucer, according to this theory, never attained—who could speak with propriety of a production of his thirtieth year as a work of his youth.

So much can be said in reply to the reasons given for regarding 1340 as the date of the poet's birth. But there also exist serious objections to this year, drawn from his own writings and the writings of his contemporaries. There are references to his old age in these—references so distinct, so unequivocal, that it has usually been found advisable to treat them with the slightest possible notice or to ignore them altogether.

Before entering upon this part of the subject, it is important to keep steadily in view two facts. One is that Chaucer died in 1400. The other is that it was in 1386 that he is represented as saying that his age was "forty years and upwards." In order that he should be as old as sixty at the time of his death, "forty years and up-

wards" must be made to mean forty-six. But even the advocates of the later date would be willing to concede that the phrase could not be made to mean more, if any value is to be attached to it at all. The poet, therefore, if we accept this evidence as final, could not have been born before 1340; he may have been born any time between that year and 1345. Any references, accordingly, made to his age either by himself or by his contemporaries must be made to the age of a man in no case above sixty, and in most cases a good deal under it; for certain of these references were written a long while before 1400. The question, consequently, will always arise if the language employed in them is appropriate to a man born later than 1340, or even as late.

There are at least four places in his own writings in which Chaucer makes some reference to his age. Let us take them up in their chronological, or supposed chronological, order. The first of them occurs in the second book of the 'House of Fame.' The poet represents himself as having been seized and borne up into space by the eagle, the messenger of Jove. He is carried so high that the earth seems no more than a point in space. Below him lies the region of cloud and storm. He begins to doubt whether he is there in body or in spirit. Thereupon a conversation takes place between him and the eagle, which opens in the following manner:

"With that the eagle gan to cry,  
'Let be,' quoth he, 'thy fantasy:  
Wilt thou learn of starrès aught?'  
'Nay certainly,' quoth I, 'right naught.'

‘And why?’ ‘For I am now too old.’  
‘Ellès<sup>1</sup> I wouldè thee have told,’  
Quoth he, ‘the starrès namès, lo,  
And all the heavenès signs thereto,  
And which they be.’ ‘No force,’<sup>2</sup> quoth I.”

Here we have Chaucer giving as a reason for not caring to learn about the stars that he was now too old, or, as the early printed editions read, that he was old. The date of the poem from which the extract is taken cannot be stated with anything like certainty. Yet it is not regarded by Chaucer students as belonging to a late period in the poet's literary activity. From a passage contained in it, it is thought by all of them to have been written during the time he was controller of the port of London. This position he held from 1374 to 1386. If this be true, we have a man, a scholar by nature, who was not more than forty-six years of age, and who may have been less than thirty-six, giving as a reason for not entering upon a new study that he was too old to take it up.

Not much direct weight, it may be conceded, can be attached to these lines in settling the question now under discussion. Nor can much more be given to the two somewhat similar references to himself contained in the earlier version of the prologue to the ‘Legend of Good Women.’ In the course of the censure which the God of Love is represented as bestowing upon Chaucer for dissuading wise men from entering upon his service, he addresses him in these words:

<sup>1</sup> Else.

<sup>2</sup> No matter.



"And thinkest in thy wit, that is full cool,  
 That he n<sup>1</sup>is but a very proper fool  
 That loveth paramours<sup>1</sup> too hard and hote<sup>2</sup>;  
 Well wot I thereby thou beginnest dote  
 As oldè foolès, when hir<sup>3</sup> spirit faileth;  
 Then blame they folk and wit<sup>4</sup> not what hem<sup>5</sup> aileth."

It may be said that Chaucer here is not described as one of the old fools whose spirit is failing on account of advancing years, but simply as being like them; but later in the speech he is included by implication. The God of Love tells him—

"By Saintè Venus, of whom that I was born,  
 Although that thou reneyed<sup>6</sup> hast my lay,<sup>7</sup>  
 As other oldè foolès, many a day,  
 Thou shalt repentè that it shall be seen."

These passages are not in the received version. The prologue itself is generally, perhaps universally, conceded to have been composed somewhere between 1382 and 1385. According to the theory that Chaucer was born in 1340, he must have been between forty-two and forty-five when he wrote these lines. The way in which the God of Love speaks of him is hardly applicable to one who has reached no later period in life than this. It is not, indeed, desirable to draw any positive inference from the two passages quoted; but so far as value can be attached to the evidence they furnish, they are appropriate only to a man who has already passed his half-century.

<sup>1</sup> To love in the way of earthly love.

<sup>2</sup> Hotly.

<sup>3</sup> Their.

<sup>4</sup> Know.

<sup>5</sup> Them.

<sup>6</sup> Denied.

<sup>7</sup> Law.

The two remaining references that Chaucer makes to his age are of vastly more importance in the discussion of this question. Among his works is a poem addressed by him to his friend Scogan. From a production attributed to the latter, which is still extant, we know that he was an ardent admirer of the former, whom he calls his master. He seems also to have been on intimate terms with the royal family, for his poem is addressed to the sons of Henry IV., who at the time of its composition was the reigning monarch.

In his poetical epistle Chaucer represents Scogan as kneeling at the well-head of grace and honor, while he, as dull as if he were dead, is at the end of the stream which flows from this fountain. He is lingering "forgotten in solitary wilderness." He begs his friend to bear him in mind and mention his name wherever it may be to him of most service. It is quite clear that the poet is dissatisfied with his condition and prospects: he is on the lookout for something better. Obviously the probable date of this production—for probability is the utmost for which we can hope—is a matter of importance.

On the margin of the three manuscripts which exist of this poem there are readings which doubtless came either from the author himself or from a scribe well acquainted with the facts. Against "the well-head of grace, of all honor and worthiness," is written Windsor, meaning thereby the court. Against the "solitary wilderness" in which the writer is dwelling forgotten is inscribed Greenwich. It was there the poet was residing at the time this letter was composed, if these marginal

references are accepted as correct. That they are in accordance with the precise fact there seems not the slightest reason to doubt, no matter from whose hand they may have originally come. Their truth may be corroborated, and the date of the poem may be approximately determined by the evidence found in official documents. On the 13th of March, 1390, Chaucer was appointed on a commission with five others to superintend the cleaning and repair of the ditches, gutters, sewers, bridges, causeways, and trenches on the banks of the Thames between the towns of Woolwich and Greenwich. This would not unnaturally make him a temporary resident of the latter place. So, while it cannot be asserted positively, it is a reasonable inference that the composition of this particular poem was some time after March, 1390.

There are other things in it, moreover, which tend to fix its possible if not probable date. The burden of the poem is largely the tremendous rains which threaten to drown out the entire land. This is a subject which would naturally present itself with peculiar force to the mind of a man engaged in superintending repairs along the banks of a stream. Was there any such period of excessive rainfall? Records of occurrences of this kind are scanty; yet under 1393 the chroniclers mention the floods of water that came down in such abundance that at particular places even walls were swept away, and men saved themselves with difficulty from drowning. It is possible that this is the specific "deluge" mentioned in the poem. It is idle to claim certainty for this reference, bearing in mind, as we must, the dearth of

records of phenomena of this nature, and allowing, as we ought, for the possible exaggeration in which a poet might indulge in an epistle of a half-serious, half-jocose character. Still, it may not be unreasonable to claim for it probability. If we assume, therefore, that this particular rainfall is the one intended by the writer—and this is the assumption of the few scholars who have investigated the matter at all—the date of the composition of the poem must then be put down as the autumn of 1393.

These rains, according to Chaucer's assertion in his epistle, occur at an unusual season of the year. Never before, when the planet Venus was in the position she is, has such a state of things been known. In the rallying vein which runs through the poem Scogan himself is held up as the offender to whose crime is due the deluge which is drenching the land. He had spoken words in blasphemy of the Goddess of Love. He had said things forbidden in her law. He had declared that he had given up at Michaelmas the service of his mistress because she was indifferent to his distress. Every rebellious word, however, which Scogan, in the pride or recklessness of his heart, had uttered, was put on record by Cupid. For his inability to hold his tongue the whole land was suffering from the wrath of the angry Goddess of Love.

There are apparent contradictions in this poem: at any rate there is in one or two passages uncertainty of meaning. There can be no reasonable doubt, however, that in the following lines Chaucer is speaking in the character of an old man:



"Now certes, friend, I dread of thine unhap,  
Lest for thy guilt the wreak<sup>1</sup> of love proceed  
On all hem<sup>2</sup> that be hoar and round of shape,  
That be so likely folk in love to speed:  
Then shall we for our labor have no meed:  
But well I wot thou wilt answer and say,  
'Lo, oldè Grizzle list<sup>3</sup> to ryme and play.'

"Nay, Scogan, say not so, for I me excuse,  
God help me so, in no ryme doubtèless:  
Ne think I ne'er of sleep to wake my muse,  
That rusteth in my sheathè still in peace:  
While I was young I put it forth in press:  
But all shall passen that men prose or ryme,  
Take every man his turn as for his time."

This poem is an interesting one in several respects; but the part just quoted is its most interesting passage. On the question now under discussion it has a very visible bearing. In these lines Chaucer imputes both to his appearance and feelings the characteristics of advanced age. He inferentially includes himself among those who are "hoar and round of shape," and adds an ironical reference to the likelihood of such men being successful in affairs of love. He represents himself as termed by his friend "Old Grizzle," or as we should now say "Old Graybeard." Even more marked is his reference to his mental condition. He cares no longer to write. His muse—to employ his mixed metaphor—is now quietly rusting in its sheath; and from its sleep he purposes never again to awaken it. He is now a veteran, and he feels no disposition to lag superfluous on

<sup>1</sup> Vengeance.

<sup>2</sup> Them.

<sup>3</sup> It pleases the old gray-beard.

the stage. In the crowd of aspirants he could bear his part and do his share when he was young; but he now recognizes that his time has gone by, and that his place must be taken by others in their turn. These are the words of a man in whom increasing age and failing strength have dulled ambition and abated force and fire. They are appropriate only on the lips of one whose years have passed threescore, who recognizes in nerveless sinews and sluggish thoughts the sure signs of advancing decay. But, according to the theory that Chaucer was born in 1340, he was at the outside no more than fifty-four years old at the time that he is usually credited with having given this account of his condition and feelings. But at that period a man is ordinarily in the full vigor of his faculties. He is not apt to think himself old, whatever others may think of him. Even if it be conceded that these lines are the expression of transient feeling, due to the occasional depression of spirit that follows disappointment or illness, still their testimony to the fact of age cannot well be gainsaid. It is hard, indeed, to ascribe them to any one under sixty. Only he can do it unhesitatingly who mistakes intensity of conviction for strength of argument.

There is still another reference by Chaucer to his age. It is contained in a poem called the 'Complaint of Venus.' This, as the writer tells us, is a translation from the French of Gransoun, who in some of the manuscripts is called Sir Otes de Graunsoun, Knight of Savoy. The original is not extant, or at least not known. The version itself has little claim to poetical inspiration. It is rather one of those feats of poetical strength in which

Chaucer occasionally indulged when he sought to introduce into our tongue the complicated metres and the frequently recurring rymes of certain kinds of French verse. In this respect it is a marked illustration of how the poet could bend to his own purposes a stubborn language, of which a characteristic has always been the comparative lack of words ending with similar sounds. 'The Complaint of Venus' consists strictly of nine stanzas of eight lines each. They are divided into three parts, and in each of the three parts there are just three rymes, so that the seventy-two lines of the poem have in all only nine rymes. To this poem he appended the following envoy in a slightly different, but sufficiently complicated metre :

"Princes, receiveth this complaint in gree,<sup>1</sup>  
 Unto your excellent benignity  
 Direct,<sup>2</sup> after<sup>3</sup> my little súffisaunce.<sup>4</sup>  
 For eld,<sup>5</sup> that in my spirit dulleth me,  
 Hath of enditing<sup>6</sup> all the subtlety  
 Well nigh bereft out of my rémembrance:  
 And eke to me it is a great penánce,  
 Sith ryme in English hath such scarcity,  
 To follow word by word the curiosity<sup>7</sup>  
 Of Gransoun, flower of hem<sup>8</sup> that make<sup>9</sup> in France."

No one knows when this poem was written, but no one can doubt, after reading the passage quoted, that it is the work of a man advanced in years. The whole envoy is apologetic in its character. And upon what is

<sup>1</sup> With favor.    <sup>2</sup> Directed.    <sup>3</sup> According to.    <sup>4</sup> Ability.    <sup>5</sup> Old age.  
<sup>6</sup> Writing.    <sup>7</sup> Carefully wrought, and intricate arrangement (of rymes).  
<sup>8</sup> Them.    <sup>9</sup> Compose poetry.

the plea for consideration based? What is the main reason given why the princes, whoever they were, to whom these lines were sent, should look upon them with favor? It is because old age has dulled the spirit of the poet. More than that it has wellnigh bereft him of his skill in writing. Can it be seriously maintained that these are the words of a man who was no more than sixty at the utmost when they were written, and who may have been several years younger? Yet this is the ground that must be assumed by those who hold that Chaucer was born no earlier than 1340.

So much for the references which Chaucer makes to his own age. We come now to those made by others. Obviously it would be improper to attach weight to the words of men who, however ancient in comparison with us, flourished some time after the poet had died. These at the best could only bear witness to the fact of a tradition and not to its truth. Gawin Douglas, for instance, terms Chaucer "venerable." Even were we to assume that the epithet refers to age, and not to character, we cannot lose sight of the fact that it is employed by a writer who was not born till three fourths of a century after the death of him to whom it was applied. On the other hand, contemporary references to the age of the poet are few. By Occleve he is, in two places at least, called "Father Chaucer," and "Father" was then a term given to a man far gone in years. Such a usage, however, could hardly be called decisive as to the point whether a man had reached threescore or threescore and ten. All that can be said of it is, that it



is much more appropriate to the latter period than to the former.

There is, however, one celebrated reference to Chaucer made by a contemporary. Yet, well-known as it is, the weight it has in this discussion has been generally overlooked. This reference is the one made by Gower to his brother author in the '*Confessio Amantis*.' Of this poem there are two versions, or rather there are two versions of its prologue and epilogue. The body of the work seems to have undergone no special alteration, but the beginning and the end are essentially different. They are different, not only in the words, but in the state of mind they show to exist in the writer. In the discussion of Chaucer's age they have been, and still are, frequently confounded. Their exact relation to each other, and to the poet who is mentioned in one of them, needs, therefore, to be clearly pointed out.

The first version of the prologue has nothing in it to fix the date of composition. In it Gower tells us how he happened to set about the production of the poem. He was rowing upon the Thames, and by chance met his sovereign, Richard II. The king, as soon as he saw him, bade him come into his own barge. There he talked to him of various matters, and in the course of the conversation expressed a desire, which to the subject was a command, that he should write some new work. Students of English literature do not need to be told how faithfully Gower carried out the monarch's wish. He was weighed down by the burden of years. He was worn out by long illness. Still, neither of these

afflictions deterred him from undertaking the task assigned him, and more than thirty-three thousand lines attest to all time what man in his weakest estate is able to accomplish when inspired by the fervor of loyalty and the muse of long-windedness. It was in consequence of this meeting upon the Thames that the work came out in what may be called its first version. It is in the epilogue to this version, and to this version alone, that the reference to Chaucer occurs. This brief mention of his greater contemporary is, indeed, the solitary oasis which leads many to visit the extensive but arid Sahara of the 'Confessio Amantis.'

In this epilogue, Venus, on parting with the poet, is represented as giving him the following injunction:

"And greet well Chaucer, when ye meet,  
 As my disciple and my poète:  
 For in the flowers of his youth,  
 In sundry wise, as he well couth,<sup>1</sup>  
 Of ditties and of songes glade,  
 The which he for my sakè made,  
 The land fulfillèd is o'erall :<sup>2</sup>  
 Wherefore to him in speciál  
 Above all other I am most holde :<sup>3</sup>  
 Forthy<sup>4</sup> now in his dayès old,  
 Thou shalt him tellen this messáge,  
 That he upon his later age,  
 To set an end of all his work,  
 As he which is mine owèn clerk,  
 Do make<sup>5</sup> his testament of love,  
 As thou hast done thy shrift above,  
 So that my court it may record."

<sup>1</sup> Could. <sup>2</sup> Everywheré. <sup>3</sup> Beholden. <sup>4</sup> Therefore. <sup>5</sup> Caused to be made.

The poet promises to bear the message intrusted to him, and the work concludes with a eulogium upon Richard II., in which he is represented as combining in himself about all the good qualities that are distributed throughout the race.

In the second version there is no praise of the king at all. On the contrary, there is a perceptible avoidance of saying anything in his favor. The poet has clearly gone over to the party of opposition. He sees nothing but misgovernment and misfortune in the policy that is prevailing. His book does not now profess to be composed for the sake of England's monarch, but for the sake of England itself. It is no longer dedicated to Richard, but to the cousin who was to dethrone and succeed him. It is in these lines that Gower points out that both his poem, and the opinions expressed in his poem, have undergone revision and amendment:

“This book, upon amendement—  
To stand at his commandement  
With whom mine heart is of accord,  
I send unto mine owen lord  
Which of Lancaster is Henry named:  
The highè God him hath proclaimed  
Full of knighthood and allè grace.”

This book, it will be observed, has, according to Gower's own words, been subjected to amendment, though the amendment was confined principally, and perhaps wholly, to the prologue and epilogue. In his new version he takes pains to date definitely the time of its composition. He says:

“For that fewè men endite  
 In our English, I thinkè make  
 A bookè for Englàndès sake,  
 The year sixteenth of King Richárd.”

The Latin marginal note to the passage just quoted, in the manuscripts containing the revised version, declares definitely that it was in this year that Gower composed and finally completed the work which he specifically destined for his own lord, Henry of Lancaster, then Earl of Derby. This establishes the fact that the production of the poem in its amended form must have been between June, 1592, and June, 1593—that is, the sixteenth year of King Richard.

In the epilogue to this version no praise, as has been said, appears of the king, to whom the poet had in his previous version expressed devotion so ardent. But besides this the reference to Chaucer has also been discarded. The latter fact has given rise to numberless conjectures to account for the omission. No satisfactory reason for it can be given in the present state of our knowledge, and we may therefore be sure that unsatisfactory guesses will never cease to be hazarded. But two unnecessary yet common mistakes exist in regard to the passage mentioning Chaucer. One is that this reference occurs in the second version instead of the first. The other and more serious error is that this first version belongs to the year 1392–3, and the second to the year 1399, when Richard had been dethroned and the Earl of Derby had succeeded his unhappy cousin as Henry IV.<sup>1</sup> The facts that have been given show both

<sup>1</sup> Even Tyrwhitt speaks of the new edition of the ‘*Confessio Amantis*’ as published after the accession of Henry IV.



these statements to be false. The matter, however, is so important, not to say decisive, in this controversy, that it will bear reiteration. The dedication of the second version is not to the King of England, but to Henry of Lancaster; and the second version is dated by the author himself in the sixteenth year of Richard II.—that is to say, in 1392-3. The earlier version in which the reference to Chaucer occurs belongs to a period before 1392-3, when Gower was full of love and loyalty to the reigning monarch. What this period was it is impossible to tell with certainty; it is no easy matter to infer with probability. The editor of the '*Confessio Amantis*' attributes this original form of the poem to some time before 1386; for as early as 1387 Henry of Lancaster had joined the opposition to Richard II., and it was at that time that the unwise and reckless course of the young king was alienating from him the hearts of his subjects. Others date the composition of the work even earlier. That several years intervened between the two versions it is reasonable to conclude; for much more conspicuous than the change of words is the change of mind which they indicate on the part of the poet.

Even were we to concede that the reference to Chaucer belonged to the year 1392-3, it would then be practically impossible to reconcile its language with the theory that he was born in 1340. In that case he would be fifty-two years old when he is mentioned. Accordingly, at an age when the mental faculties are usually in their highest perfection, he is enjoined by his friend to set an end to all his work by composing his testament

of love. This would be bad enough. But this would be far from being the worst. The reference to Chaucer must fairly be dated some years before 1392. This would lead to an extraordinary conclusion on the hypothesis that the year of his birth was 1340. We should be asked to believe that a poet, aged somewhere between forty and fifty, could be seriously recommended by a friend to put the finishing stroke to his literary career by the composition of a special work. More than this, we should be asked to believe that this same poet at the same period of life could, in the course of a few lines, be twice referred to as advanced in years—once by the phrase “in his dayes old,” and once by the phrase, “his later age.”

There can only be one way of breaking the force of these references to Chaucer's age. This is by taking the ground that the average duration of human life in the fourteenth century was so much shorter than in the nineteenth that a man would then be termed old at a much earlier period than he would be now. Contemporary evidence, it may be claimed, can be adduced for this view. About 1340 a monk called Richard Rolle de Hampole wrote a work entitled ‘The Pricke of Conscience.’ In it he said expressly that few men now pass the age of forty years, and fewer still the age of fifty, as in former times they were wont to do. His precise words, as they occur in his poem, are:

“Fone<sup>1</sup> men may now fourty yhere<sup>2</sup> pas,  
And foner fifty, als in somty<sup>3</sup> was.”

Reasoning of this nature, however, is hardly even spe-

<sup>1</sup> Few.

<sup>2</sup> Years.

<sup>3</sup> Former time

cious, and it is certainly much more specious than convincing. The few dates that are easily accessible give no support to such a view. That the average of human life was shorter in the Middle Ages than now can be conceded; but that the individual life was shorter may safely be denied. For the former condition of things there were sufficient causes. Constant wars, occasional pestilences, perpetual neglect of the most ordinary sanitary precautions, together with the low state of medical science, must have increased the death rate enormously and cut down a large proportion of the population in their prime. But while the average duration of human life is longer now than in the fourteenth century, there is no ground for maintaining that individual longevity varied materially from what is found at the present day, though for the reasons just specified a much greater proportionate number of persons doubtless reach with us extreme old age. Nor do the words of Hampole justify any different conclusion. They probably refer to the general average, and not to special cases. It would assuredly be hard to show that there has ever been a period in the history of the race when the limit of man's years upon earth was different from the threescore and ten fixed by the Hebrew psalmist hundreds of years before the coming of Christ. Hampole's lines certainly have no particular reference either to his own time or to his own country. They are not even an expression of his individual opinion or observation. They are nothing more than a translation of what was said by Innocent III. nearly two hundred years before, in a treatise in which he depicted in the gloomiest colors, and in the most ex-

aggerated terms, the miserable condition of the human race.<sup>1</sup> In view of these facts, the force of the references to the poet's age cannot be overcome by any general statements about the brevity of life in the Middle Ages. To counteract them we must either assume that Chaucer was a prematurely old man, for which there is no evidence, or that the charge of old age was applied to him in jest, for which there is just as little reason.

This may be said to close the argument of those who advocate for the poet's birth a date earlier than 1340. In connection with the discussion it may be pertinent to remark how much perplexity is added to the subject by the different views different persons feel obliged to take of the same thing. Occleve, on the margin of one of his works, made a colored portrait of the man he styled his master and father. It was painted from memory, as he expressly tells us, and has made the features of the poet more familiar than those of any of the early writers of our tongue save Shakspeare; for it has been again and again reproduced. Sir Harris Nicolas, who described it before the discussion in regard to his birth can be said to have come up, asserts that "evident marks of advanced age appear in the countenance." This is disputed by the poet's latest biographer, who concedes the grayness of the hair and beard, but denies that this fact could be taken of itself to contradict the supposition that he died about the age of sixty.<sup>2</sup> The Director of the Chaucer Society is not satisfied with this negative way of putting

<sup>1</sup> "*Pauci enim nunc ad quadraginta, paucissimi ad sexaginta annos perveniunt,*" are the words of Inno-

cent.—*De Contemptu Mundi*, lib. i., cap. x.

<sup>2</sup> Prof. A. W. Ward, in *English Men of Letters* series.



things. "Occleve's portrait of Chaucer," says Mr. Furnivall, "is surely one of a man not above sixty."<sup>1</sup>

In the foregoing pages the reader will find the main arguments used on both sides of a vexed question, which with our present knowledge can never be definitely determined. One long-accepted belief has, however, been clearly shown to be an error. The date of 1328 as the year of the poet's birth, as it never had any ground for its adoption besides conjecture, must now be peremptorily discarded. The question has been settled decisively by a record of court proceedings which has been brought to light within a recent period.<sup>2</sup> In December, 1324, John Chaucer, the poet's father, then under fourteen years of age, was forcibly carried away from the custody of his legal guardians, his mother and his step-father, Richard Chaucer. The object of the abduction was to marry him to Joan, the daughter of Walter de Westhale. The father of the girl was dead, but the widow had married Geoffrey Stace, one of the persons who bore a principal part in these proceedings. The transaction seems to have had its origin in a family quarrel about the disposition of property. The language of the complaint of the plaintiffs unquestionably gives the impression that some of those concerned in the attempt were related to the young heir. The matter was brought before the courts, and the jury returned heavy damages against the abductors, but found also that they had failed in their scheme of marriage. For some reason this part of the project had miscarried, though it

<sup>1</sup> *Notes and Queries*, May 13, 1871, p. 412.

<sup>2</sup> By Walter Rye, in the *London Athenæum*, January 29, 1881.

seems at the outset to have been the belief of Mary and Richard Chaucer that it had been successfully accomplished. The defendants were put in prison for not paying the money. A petition praying for relief from the excessive fine imposed was presented by them to Parliament in 1328, and in it the declaration was made that John Chaucer, the stolen child, was then at large and still unmarried. At that date he would have been about eighteen years of age. What became of the petition is not known, but the matter dragged on in the courts for a long while after.

This disposes of 1328 as a possible date of the poet's birth. Future discoveries may perhaps give a decisive answer to the inquiry when he was born, but he is little to be trusted who, in the existing state of our knowledge, presumes to give a decisive answer now. At present it must be deemed undetermined. In the consideration of the subject I have endeavored to give the views of the contending parties fairly; but in the statement of opposing opinions it is perhaps impossible for any one to be wholly uninfluenced by his own belief; and my own conviction is strong that the weight of the evidence we have is decidedly in favor of a year considerably earlier than 1340 as that of the poet's birth. A time between 1331 and 1335 would be in satisfactory accordance with all the conditions that are implied in the references made to his age by Chaucer himself or by his contemporaries. This would involve an early marriage on the part of his father. That, however, would be in no sense remarkable. Early marriages were then the rule and not the exception. As their object, in fact, was often, if not

usually, to unite properties rather than persons, the wishes of the parties most interested were not too much consulted. One consideration, too, may not unnaturally have had weight in this particular instance. If the intent in the abduction of John Chaucer were actually what it seems to have been—to force him into a marriage—it would assuredly be the best preventive against the renewal of any similar attempt for his natural guardians to provide him at the earliest possible moment with a wife of their own choosing. It is useless, however, to expend much speculation upon a subject in which the accidental discovery of fresh facts may overthrow any day the most apparently well-founded conclusions of the judgment.

But born some time Chaucer certainly was. The obscurity that shrouds the date of his birth continues, however, to hang over the whole of his early life. In all probability he received the best education attainable by any one in his circumstances. His opportunities, whatever they were, we may be sure were well improved; but what he studied and where he studied are utterly unknown. About his childhood and youth we are, in truth, in absolute ignorance. The first information we have of him belongs to 1357, for we need feel little hesitation in assuming that he is the Geoffrey Chaucer who is mentioned in the fragments of the roll that have already been described. According to that he was in the service of the royal family. He was employed in some position not definitely determined in the household of the king's third son, Lionel, who was created in 1362 Duke of Clarence. This prince had been married when fourteen years

old to Elizabeth de Burgh, aged twenty, sole child and heiress of the Earl of Ulster. It is the movements of the latter that the household account preserves. Our interest in them, however, is due to no interest now attaching to her, but to the then unimportant dependant belonging to her train; for it is probable that Chaucer accompanied her in all her journeyings, as he certainly did in some. From them, in consequence, we may get a faint notion of the things he saw, though not of the life he lived. The princess was at various times at London, at Doncaster, at Anglesea, at Liverpool, at Reading, and at several other places. She was present at Windsor at the celebration of the feast of St. George; she was at Woodstock at the feast of Pentecost; she attended the funeral of the Queen Dowager Isabella at London in 1358. All these and numerous other particulars are duly set down in the household account, which, indeed, faithfully records the amount of the fees she paid to the keeper of the lions in the Tower of London. But the greatest share of her time was passed at Hatfield, in Yorkshire. It was there that at the close of the year 1357 she entertained her brother-in-law, John of Gaunt, then seventeen years old. There and then it is not impossible, nor perhaps unlikely, that the poet may have met for the first time his future patron.

From this kind of life, whatever was the position he filled, Chaucer passed to a military one. In the determination of his age we may attach what weight we please to the vague phrase of "forty years and upwards," with which the testimony given in the trial of 1386 is prefaced; but there is no ground for imputing the slightest



inaccuracy to a statement so precise, and in this matter so important, as that he had borne arms for twenty-seven years. This would make him enter upon a military career in 1359, and it was in 1359 that Edward III. undertook in person for the last time to conquer France. The details of this invasion form one of those vivid pictures that glow with eternal freshness on the pages of Froissart, painting, as they do, the pomp and pageantry of war with only faint suggestions of its horrors. That chronicler tells us how Edward III. assembled at Dover a force with which he swore that he would have all France at his will; how towards the last of September he crossed the Straits and entered the enemy's land through the ever-open gate of Calais; how in the mighty host there gathered together were, besides the king himself, four of his sons, with the Black Prince at their head, as well as many of the bravest and noblest of his realm; how in three grand divisions the army set out from Calais, having with it an immense train of six thousand vehicles, which carried not only food, but mills to grind, ovens to bake, and smithies to forge; how in advance of it a band of five hundred pioneers, with mattocks and axes, went to clear the road for the unwieldy multitude that wound its way along at the rate of three leagues a day; how before it the frightened population fled into fortresses, stripping entirely from the scantily tilled soil, not yet recovered from the waste of previous wars, the little that was left; how to east and west in search of forage spread the English bands, carrying fire and sword through Artois, Picardy, and Champagne, not even sparing the imperial land of Cambray; how Ed-

ward lay before Rheims from St. Andrew's Day to the middle of Lent without being able to make any impression upon the stoutly-defended town; how he and his nobles hunted with hounds day by day, or hawked at the river, as it best pleased him; how, giving up the siege of Rheims, he was diverted from his intention of laying waste Burgundy; how he tarried for five days at Tonnerre because of the good wines he found there in store; how he then turned towards Paris, and wore out his force in fruitless efforts to take that city; how at last, in the spring of 1360, he broke up camp and moved towards Brittany, purposing to spend the summer in that province and return to the siege of the capital at the time of the vintage; and how at the village of Breigny, near Chartres, he was induced to conclude a peace in May, which was ratified in form the following October. All this and more Froissart tells us, with an evident leaning to make out the best showing possible for the English of a successful campaign. For us the important thing is that Chaucer took part in this invasion. What position he held or where he personally served we do not know. He tells us in the testimony so often cited that, before the town of Retters, he saw Sir Richard Scrope, clothed in the arms to which he laid claim, and that during the whole expedition he had seen him so armed until he himself was captured. Retters is a place no longer known, at least to biographers of the poet. By most it is thought to be the village of Retiers, not very far from Rennes in Brittany. This view may be true, but it is certainly not plausible. When Chaucer was taken prisoner, Edward's forces had not been in that

province, and there seems no ground to suppose that he was absent from the main army. It is to be observed that Chaucer does not say that he was captured before the town of Retters, but that there was the specific place where he had seen Sir Richard Scrope.<sup>1</sup> The former interpretation has, however, often been put upon his language. It has been further suggested by those who regard Retters as Retiers in Brittany, that Chaucer met with his misadventure while out on a foraging expedition. If that be true his ill-fortune was well merited. A foraging party, that "set out to carry on operations some two hundred miles from the main army for which it was seeking to secure supplies, fully deserved to be captured.

The further fact that the poet was released, and perhaps speedily released, we learn from the official records. In one of these it is set down that on the 1st of March, 1360, Edward III. contributed sixteen pounds towards the ransom of Geoffrey Chaucer. The language of the document leaves uncertain whether this was only a part or the whole of the amount paid. The former is rather the more natural interpretation. The fact of the contribution leads, at any rate, to the impression that Chaucer was at the time in the immediate service of the monarch. There has, however, been some comment, not altogether good-natured, on the sum paid by the king for the poet.

<sup>1</sup> "Demandez, si les armez dazure ove une bende dor apperteignent, ou deyvent apperteigner, au dit mons. Richard du droit et de heritage, dist,

"Que oil ; qar il lez ad veu estre armez en Fraunce devant la ville de

Retters, et mons. Henry Lescrope armoz en mesmes les armez ove un label blanc et a baner, et le dit mons. Richard armez en les entiers armez dazure ove une bende dor, et issint il lez vist armer par tout le dit viage, tanque le dit Geffrey estoit pris."

It has been contrasted with other entries in the same roll, not very favorably to his majesty's appreciation of literature. These show that at about the same time he gave Robert de Clinton between sixteen and seventeen pounds for a horse, and John de Beverley twenty pounds for a war-horse. But the fault-finding seems somewhat unreasonable. It is wholly unreasonable if we date Chaucer's birth in 1340. He was ransomed, so far as the king had anything to do with it, not for his literary qualifications, but for his business usefulness; as a soldier, not as a poet. The censure, moreover, is based upon a mistaken conception of the comparative value of human beings and horses. There has never been a period in the history of the race when that somewhat indefinite individual, the average man, if burdened with the encumbrance of freedom, could bring the price of a good horse. In fact, if Chaucer was at this time only twenty years of age, the sum paid for his ransom must be considered extravagantly large, even if we assume that sixteen pounds was all that was actually given. The comparative purchasing power which money possesses must, of course, be taken into consideration. Unfortunately that has not been determined with exactness. By Godwin it is estimated to have had in the fourteenth century eighteen times its present value; by Sir Harris Nicolas no more than ten. Even this latter may be too high. Still, if it be correct, it is a convincing proof of the regard in which Chaucer was held that he should have been reckoned by his sovereign to be worth eight hundred dollars.

The entry which records the sum paid for his ransom



is the last reference to Chaucer that occurs for seven years. Between 1360 and 1367 lies an exasperating blank in the poet's life. Not the slightest suggestion as to what was his occupation during that time can be derived from any quarter, beyond the inference that may be drawn from the language used in the subsequent gift of a pension, that he was employed in the king's service. But even of the nature of this service, and where it kept him, or whither it took him, we have nowhere the least inkling, when we have gone so far as to assume its reality. This ignorance is so profound that conjecture, which has scattered its guesses over every part of the poet's career, has generally paid a respectful deference to this gap in our knowledge. Still, it has been a very common resource for biographers to set him at work during this period translating the *Roman de la Rose*. Godwin gave him also the additional employment of carrying on a protracted love-suit, which finally turned out successfully. The same story has been revived with variations in modern times, and it is to be regretted that a tragical instead of a fortunate ending has been given to the affair. We have been assured that during these years Chaucer was engaged in making desperate love to a hard-hearted mistress. The facts of this interesting romance have been diligently culled by a close study and comparison of certain of his poems. In their nature they are somewhat thrilling. The girl was beautiful, she was high-bred, she was above him in station.<sup>1</sup> Eight years of continuous misery was all the reward that Chau-

<sup>1</sup> "The girl was beautiful and high-bred."—*Life Records of Chaucer*, ii. 12; publications of the Chaucer Society.

cer received for his unremitting devotion to this peerless but pitiless being. Finally he abandoned the suit in despair. This tale of woe will be found, though not expressed in precisely this language, in a number of accounts of the poet's life that have made their appearance during the last few years. For the purpose of providing him with something to do between 1360 and 1367, it is perhaps as satisfactory a way as can be devised on the part of those who prefer any amount of conjecture, however great, to the acknowledgment of any ignorance, however slight. The method is the less objectionable, since, according to the story, all the ardent love-making that went on during this long period came to nothing. This result consequently harmonizes admirably with the corresponding knowledge which we possess of the life of the poet during the period itself.

But in the meantime Chaucer's father had died. Here, as in several other instances, our information comes from legal documents. In a conveyance of property bearing date January 16, 1366, the name of John Chaucer appears with that of Agnes his wife. But in a deed of the following year, dated the 6th of May, she appears and he does not. The conveying parties are described in the document as Bartholomew *atte Chapel*, citizen and vintner of London, and Agnes his wife, formerly wife of John Chaucer, late citizen and vintner of the said city.<sup>1</sup> The remarriage of the widow must, in any event, have followed close upon the end of the year from the death

<sup>1</sup> "Bartholomeus atte Chapel, civis et vinitarius Londonie, et Agnes, uxor ejus, ac uxor quondam Johannis Chaucier, nuper civis et vinitarii dicte civitatis." This information was communicated by Mr. W. D. Selby in the *London Academy* for Oct. 13, 1877.

of the husband, and, of course, may have come within it. The most reasonable supposition is that Chaucer's father died early in 1366. Facts like these are of interest for the light they throw upon the poet's family; but to any knowledge of the poet himself they necessarily add nothing.

When the biographer, emerging at last from this seven years' slough of despond, catches sight once more of Chaucer, he appears in immediate attendance upon the king. After 1360 his name occurs for the first time in a document bearing the date of June 20, 1367. By its terms he was to receive from his sovereign a pension of twenty marks a year, in consideration of services already rendered or to be rendered. This was to last for life, or until some other provision had been made in his behalf. It is from the statement in this document about services already rendered that the inference is drawn that during these years he had been in close connection with the court. In it he is styled *dilectus valettus noster*, and in the issue-rolls that follow he is usually termed, until 1372, valet, or, more specifically, valet or yeoman of the king's chamber. In the order for gifts of robes to the household he appears in 1368, however, as one of the squires of less degree. Towards the close of 1372 he is called the king's *armiger*, and either by that title or that of *scutifer* he is thenceforward almost invariably mentioned. Though the duties of a valet were almost menial in their nature, the person for whom they were done ennobled the acts. As the persons discharging them were brought into immediate contact with the sovereign, the position must always have been regarded

as an object of honorable ambition, and would only have been conferred upon those who had more than ordinary claims to the distinction.

From 1367 on the name of Geoffrey Chaucer occurs with a good deal of frequency in the public records. From these it appears that he was concerned in some way in the war between France and England, which, always smouldering, broke out into flame in 1369 in consequence of the complaints against the Black Prince, made by the Gascons to the French court. Among the records of that very year is found an entry to the effect that ten pounds were advanced by Henry de Wakefield to Chaucer while in the war in France. This vague statement is all we know of him in connection with the renewal of hostilities between the two kingdoms. Still, the fact that in April of the following year his pension was not drawn by him, but was drawn for him by another, may be taken as indicating, though it is very far from proving, that he was still out of the country, and perhaps participating in the military movements that were going forward in an intermittent way on the continent. If so, however, he must soon after have been back in England; for letters of protection, dated June 20, 1370, were given him on occasion of his going abroad in the service of the king. These were to continue in force until Michaelmas. The rolls which record this fact record nothing more. They do not furnish anything, even in the way of a remote suggestion, as to the nature of the service he was sent to perform. But he must have returned within his allotted time, for on the 8th of October he drew his pension in person.



It is not unnaturally, in connection with this little neglected business of drawing his pension, that the name of Chaucer appears most frequently upon the official records. That given by the king in 1367 was not the only one he received during the reign of Edward III. On the 10th of June, 1374, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, made him a grant of ten pounds a year for life. The terms in which this is expressed indicate that it was not a payment for something to be done, but a recognition of what had already been done. It was conferred in consideration of past services which had been rendered by the poet and by his wife Philippa to the duke and to his duchess, and to the late queen, his mother. According to the view of Sir Harris Nicolas this grant was probably a commutation of a pension granted before August, 1372, to Philippa Chaucer, and was therefore bestowed upon the wife rather than the husband.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was this all. Though never graced with the title of poet laureate, Chaucer obtained at this same period what came to be one of the most distinguishing perquisites which attached itself to that office in later times. On the 23d of April, 1374—the day of the annual celebration of the feast of St. George at Windsor—a daily pitcher of wine was granted him for life, to be received at the port of London from the hands of the king's butler.<sup>2</sup> This may have been commuted for a certain sum of money from the very beginning; at a little later date

<sup>1</sup> Nicolas, *Life of Chaucer*, p. 48, in vol. i. of Morris's edition of *Chaucer's Poetical Works*. Nicolas, however, does not give any documentary authority for this pension

of 1372, though such is the confidence in his accuracy that in spite of its non-discovery it is generally assumed to be in existence.

<sup>2</sup> Rymer's *Fœdera*, vii. 35.

it certainly was. In 1377 Chaucer received seven pounds, two shillings, sixpence and a half, in lieu of this daily pitcher of wine from October 27, 1376, to June 21, 1377. This was a period of nearly eight months. The commutation accordingly shows that the value of the wine furnished was reckoned at about sixpence a day. The inference might be drawn that the poet ran no risk of falling into habits of inebriety from the size of this allowance. The quantity, however, was greater than it seems. Wine was both common and cheap at that period, the price being about sixpence a gallon.<sup>1</sup> There may have been a special reason for commuting the allowance for money in the instance cited, as Chaucer was absent from England most of the time. The practice of so doing was, however, probably pretty general, if not actually universal. Certainly, in the case of the poet, by a warrant issued the 18th of April, 1378, the new king granted him, in lieu of the wine, twenty marks a year for life.

In most instances Chaucer drew his pensions in person. This fact is expressly stated on the rolls. When he did not, it was ordinarily in consequence of his absence from England, and the reasons for these absences are usually made known by other official documents. Entries of such a character give us regular and definite glimpses of the poet's movements. Though they cannot be said to bring his personality nearer our apprehension, they furnish at least a suggestive estimate of the opinion held of his qualifications by his superiors. Dry as they

<sup>1</sup> Thorold Rogers, *History of Agriculture and Prices*, i. 622.

are, they have moreover been largely the means of destroying the monstrous fabric of fiction which so long did duty as a life of the poet. Especially by these was Sir Harris Nicolas enabled to demonstrate the utter falsehood of Chaucer's flight from England by showing that at the very time he was supposed to be in exile and distress in Zealand, he was drawing with praiseworthy regularity his pension in London *per manus proprias*, as the rolls express it—that is to say, in person.

Besides the gifts which have been already mentioned, there fell to Chaucer other substantial tokens of regard from those high in authority. On the 8th day of November, 1375, he received the custody of the person and estates of Edmund Staplegate, of Kent, a minor whose father had died in 1372. This was a common method of rewarding favorites of the crown. In the roll which contains this grant it is said to be conferred upon "our beloved esquire."<sup>1</sup> This wardship, which lasted between two and three years, brought to Chaucer the sum of one hundred and four pounds. There was still another instance in which there was bestowed upon him a similar mark of royal favor. At the very close of 1375 he received the custody of five solidates of rent in Solys, in Kent, as a consequence of the minority of William de Solys, a child one year old, and heir of John Solys, deceased. With it was joined, as was probably customary in such cases, the *maritagium*, or the fee which a minor, as tenant of the crown, paid for the consent of the king in case of a marriage contracted while under age. The

<sup>1</sup> "Dilecto scutifero nostro, Galfrido Chaucer."

precise value of a solidate is uncertain, and no record exists to show how much Chaucer received from this source. The following year he was the recipient of a reward of another character. In July, 1376, while controller of the customs, he was granted a little more than seventy-one pounds. This was the price of some wool which had been forfeited by a certain John Kent, of London, who had conveyed it to Dordrecht without paying the duty. These various benefactions furnish fairly satisfactory evidence as to the estimation in which he was held. At the same time there is no reason to assume that the gifts were made him for services not rendered. Chaucer was constantly employed in civil offices at home and in diplomatic missions abroad. In both cases it is very certain that the positions he filled were never in the nature of sinecures. It is the latter of these duties which will be spoken of first. Between 1370 and 1380 he was concerned in no less than six and perhaps in seven missions to the continent. About these it may be well to give at this point a connected account of the little that is known.

He went abroad in 1370, as has been said, on the king's service, in the discharge of some mission, of the nature of which we know nothing. But about his next employment there is more definite information. The republic of Genoa had been making many complaints of the depredations committed upon its commerce by English privateers, and in 1371 a treaty had been ratified between it and England. In the following year Chaucer was joined in a commission with James Pronan and John de Mari, two Genoese citizens. They were



given full power to treat with the republic in regard to the selection of a place on the English coast where a commercial establishment might be formed by the Genoese.<sup>1</sup> We know something of Chaucer's movements in this mission; and an historian of British commerce may, perhaps, be able to inform us at some future time, if not now, of its results. He left England in the month of December, 1372, and visited on the king's business both Genoa and Florence. Before November 22, 1373, he had returned home, for on that day he drew his pension in person. He may have been, and very likely was, absent about eleven months. This is the journey in which some of his biographers assert, and all of them hope, that he met Petrarch. That poet was at Arquà, near Padua, most of the year 1373. It is surely not unreasonable to suppose that Chaucer may have gone on from Florence to pay a visit to his celebrated contemporary; it has not been found impossible for some scholars to maintain very positively that he actually did go. The evidence for it rests entirely upon the following passage in the 'Canterbury Tales,' contained in the remarks with which the clerk of Oxford introduces the story of Griselda:

✓ "I will you tell a talè which that I  
Learnèd at Padua of a worthy clerk,  
As provèd by his wordès and his work.  
He is now dead and nailèd in his chest:  
I pray to God so give his soulè rest!  
Francis Petrarch, the laureate poète,  
Hightè this clerk, whose rhetorickè sweet  
Illuminèd all Itaille of poetry."

<sup>1</sup> Rymer's *Fœdera*, vi. 756.

It is greatly to be feared that proof of a meeting between two men which rests on no more substantial evidence than this would meet with scant consideration in a court of justice. To draw so precise an inference from so vague a statement can be done unhesitatingly only in those moods when sentiment reigns supreme and reason is felt to be an impertinence. A work like the 'Canterbury Tales' is by its very nature under no limitation of fact. It could hardly be maintained, therefore, that an assertion in it of the character of the one just recorded was necessarily intended to be taken as an account of an event which had actually happened, even though the author had been speaking of himself. But in this particular instance he is not speaking of himself; he is speaking of some one else. It is the old habit of us all to regard the wish to have a thing so, as satisfactory evidence that it is so; and this will account for much of the reasoning that has been employed to sustain the reality of this interview. We have even been told that to deny it is to charge Chaucer with a deliberate and unnecessary falsehood. An assertion of this sort, to whatever state of mind due, was never itself advanced as the result of any deliberation. We can creditably and honestly try hard to think that the two poets met; but with the knowledge we at present possess we have no right to assert it.

Towards the end of 1376 Chaucer is mentioned in connection with Sir John Burley, in whose retinue he is represented as being. They were engaged in some secret service of the king's, but the nature of it is not known. Nor is it known whether, in the accomplishment of it,

they were obliged to go abroad ; and the lack of a commission and of the usual letters of protection suggests that the duties they were called upon to perform were of a kind that had to be discharged at home. Of his next employment our information is but little more definite. In February, 1377, he was joined with Sir Thomas Percy, afterwards Earl of Worcester, in a secret mission to Flanders. From it he came back in April, and not long after his return started on another journey. On the 30th of that month he received money to go to France upon some secret business of the king's. His letters of protection were to continue till the 1st of August. It was in this year that Froissart represents him as having been concerned in the negotiations at Montreuil-sur-Mer, for the purpose of effecting a marriage between the heir of the English crown and the daughter of the French monarch, and, in consequence, the bringing about of a peace between the two countries. "So," says the chronicler, "there were sent by the King of England to Calais Sir Guichard d'Angle, Sir Richard Sturry, and Geoffrey Chaucer." This is generally supposed to be the mission upon which he was sent in April, though on this occasion the only subject for treaty was peace between the two countries, and not a marriage alliance. The latter belongs to the year following.

In June, 1377, Edward III. died. The accession of his grandson, however, made no difference in the fortunes of Chaucer, or if any difference, it was in his favor. It was in the beginning of the following year that ambassadors were sent to France to bring about a marriage alliance between the two crowns. To that mission the

poet was in some way or at some time attached, though his name does not appear in the list of envoys. A roll of several years later shows that he was paid the expenses he had incurred on that occasion.<sup>1</sup> The negotiations came to nothing, and Chaucer was speedily employed in diplomatic service in another quarter. In May, 1378, he went with Sir Edward Berkeley to Lombardy on a mission to Bernardo Visconti, Lord of Milan, and to the famous military adventurer, Sir John Hawkwood, in regard to certain matters touching the vigorous prosecution of the king's war. We are, of course, in our usual state of ignorance. We do not know the result of the mission; we do not really know what it was about. It was on this occasion that Chaucer left letters of attorney for two persons to act for him in any legal proceedings instituted in his absence. One of these was the poet John Gower. From this embassy he must, at any rate, have returned early in 1379, for on the 3d of February of that year he drew his pension in person.

This was the last of the poet's diplomatic missions. Their number and their variety, treating as they do of questions of peace and war, show the versatility of his

<sup>1</sup> Issue-rolls of the Exchequer, 4th of Richard II., March 6th—"To Geoffrey Chaucer, an esquire of the King. In money paid to his own hands, by assignment made to him this day, in discharge of £22, which the Lord the King commanded to be paid him of his gift in recompense of his wages, and the charges by him incurred in going as well as in the time of King Edward, grandfather of the present King, as a messenger of the same grandfather, to Mounstrell and Paris, in France,

on account of a treaty of peace pending between the aforesaid grandfather and his adversary of France; as in the time of the present Lord the King, to make a communication respecting a marriage to be had between the same Lord the King and the daughter of his said enemy of France."—Devon's *Issues of the Exchequer, from King Henry III. to King Henry VI. inclusive* (Lond., 1837), p. 215. Nicolas, in his 'Life of Chaucer,' prints the Latin original, Note R.



talents as well as his wide knowledge of affairs. Nor can I avoid feeling that his appointment upon so many missions, some of them of a highly delicate and important nature, is presumptive evidence that he was not a young man at the time, and must therefore have been born earlier than 1340. It would also be thoroughly consonant with this view that advancing age might have had something to do with his being relieved from duties of this kind in times when, under the most favorable circumstances, the word "travel" still justified its original sense of "toil." Be that as it may, these appointments are proofs that can hardly be gainsaid of the value put upon his abilities and services. Then, as now, there must have been plenty of persons of ample leisure and lofty connections who were both ready and anxious to be pressed into the service of the state. That these should have been passed by, and a man chosen instead not furnished with high birth and already furnished with other duties, is a fact which indicates, if it does not show convincingly, the confidence reposed in his capacity and judgment. On these missions he was frequently joined with men of a rank much more exalted than his own. We have no reason to suspect that there was in these instances any departure from the usual way of the world. The subordinate doubtless furnished the brains and did the business. The superior supplied the dignity, took the credit, and drew the larger portion of the pay.

But it was by no means to diplomacy that Chaucer's activity was confined. He held for no small period of his life positions in the civil service which are usually supposed to require business habits of a fair, if not of a

high, order. On June 8th, 1374, he was appointed controller of the customs and subsidy of wools, skins, and tanned hides in the port of London. The terms of his appointment required him to write the records of his office with his own hand, to be regularly present, and to perform his duties, not by deputy, but in person.<sup>1</sup> Here, again, fault has been found with the age of Edward III. and his successor, as if it had failed to appreciate properly the greatness of the man whose achievements were to confer upon it more enduring honor than Cressy or Poitiers. But, as in the previous instance, we are too apt to look at the poet from the point of view of our own time. The oath which Chaucer took at his appointment was the usual oath. The duties he was called upon to perform were the usual duties.. There is no reason to suppose that the position was conferred upon him as a mark of esteem for his poetical efforts. In fact, according to the theory of those who date his birth in 1340, his poetical efforts could not at that time have been either very numerous or very important. He was made controller of the port because he had earned the appointment by his services in various fields of activity, and because he was recognized as a man of business, fully qualified to discharge its duties. Certainly there is no propriety in the modern age assuming any superiority in this point over an age which it affects to call rude. No very marked advance beyond it can be seen in the appreciation of the literary profession, when four hundred years later Britain could reward the political services of

<sup>1</sup> Rymer's *Fœdera*, vii. 38.

her first great novelist with the then discreditable post of a justice of the peace for Westminster; and when, a little later still, the utmost she could do for the greatest lyric poet of his time was to confer upon him the not particularly lucrative and still less honorable office of exciseman.

This position of controller Chaucer held until 1386. In 1382 there was added to it the controllership of the petty customs, consisting of wines, candles, and other articles. The duties of this latter post he was to discharge in person or by deputy. It was probably in order to be near his place of business that in 1374 he leased from the corporation the dwelling-house at Aldgate. If it was for that object alone he took up his residence at this spot, he clearly expected to hold for life the position which he had received, for the dwelling was let to him for that length of time. "To all persons," run the words of the lease, "to whom this present writing indented shall come: Adam de Bevry, Mayor, the Aldermen, and Commonalty of the City of London, Greeting: Know ye that we, with unanimous will and assent, have granted and released by these presents unto Geoffrey Chaucer, the whole of the dwelling house above the gate of Aldgate, with the rooms built over, and a certain cellar beneath the same Gate, on the south side of that Gate, and the appurtenances thereof: to have and to hold the whole of the house aforesaid, with the rooms so built over and the said cellar and the appurtenances thereof, unto the aforesaid Geoffrey, for the whole life of him the same Geoffrey." Here Chaucer apparently continued to dwell until 1386, when he lost or resigned his place in

the customs. In October of that year the house had been given up, for it was then let by the corporation to one Richard Foster.<sup>1</sup>

Though the conditions attached to the office may have been, and probably were, rigidly enforced, it is evident that Chaucer had many vacations. The business of the king naturally overrode all other considerations and obligations. From the clerical duties of his post he was several times relieved by the embassies to foreign parts in which he was concerned. When, in 1382, he was appointed to the controllership of the petty customs, he was allowed, as we have seen, to execute the functions of that office by deputy. In 1385 he was granted a much greater favor. On the 17th of February of that year he obtained the privilege of nominating a permanent deputy. This released him from the harassing duty of constant personal attendance at his office, and from the drudgery of copying the rolls with his own hand. It is possible that in the end it wrought him injury, so far as the retention of the post was concerned. All that we can feel sure of, however, is that at the time it must have afforded a grateful relief from exacting requirements.

It is necessary to take up at this point the consideration of a matter which occurred during the period that Chaucer was holding the position of controller. In 1873 the admirers of the poet were seriously exercised, to say the least, by the discovery of a document which seemed to cast discredit upon his personal character.<sup>2</sup> This was

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Mr. J. W. Hales, in *London Academy*, Dec. 6, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> *London Athenæum*, Nov. 29, 1873.



nothing less than a deed, dated May 1st, 1380, by which an unmarried woman, named Cecilia Chaumpaigne, executed a complete release to Chaucer on her own behalf, and on behalf of her heirs, for any acts done by him *de meo raptu*, or for any other cause whatever. We have no way of ascertaining the real meaning of this document. To that the history of the occurrences that gave rise to it would be essential. We cannot tell from it whether the poet was a principal, or directly or remotely an accessory, in the transaction, which, so far as he was concerned, appears to have been compromised. Perhaps even this is too strong a term to use. In the release that was executed, no consideration is expressed as having been given by the poet, and it is hard to see that any could have been implied. But the usual obscurity is in this case rendered still more obscure by the ambiguity attaching to the word *raptus*. It may mean ravishment; it may mean abduction. To be concerned in either one of these offences can hardly be regarded as a creditable transaction, if we are to assume what we do not know, that Chaucer took a leading part in the proceeding. Singularly enough, there has been a disposition manifested to hold the poet guilty of the greater crime rather than of the lesser. It has, indeed, been insinuated that such an act, so far from being looked upon as disreputable at the time, was something in the nature of credentials which entitled him to associate on equal terms with the members of the highest classes. According to this theory, in days when a man of rank relieved the inevitable monotony of life by frequent brawls and an occasional murder, an incident of this trivial nature would, in his

own case, be hardly worthy of mention. In the case of one, like Chaucer, of inferior station, it would simply be the best of evidence as to the high social position he had attained, in that he had almost unconsciously adopted the practices and imbibed the spirit of the courtly society with which, by the force of circumstances, he had come to be closely connected.

There is no necessity of importing into this discussion the slightest sentiment for the sake of clearing the character of the poet. A man of genius may not be entitled to set up the claim that his faults are to be excused and his evil deeds condoned because he is a man of genius ; but he has a right to have his acts judged with that common fairness which would be shown in the case of one intellectually his inferior. In this instance the whole of the little evidence that exists leads almost conclusively to the view that, whatever was the nature of the offence committed, it could not have been the grosser one which has been laid to Chaucer's charge. There is nothing in the document itself to prove that he was a principal in the transaction referred to in it, whatever its nature was. The worst view of his conduct that can reasonably be taken is that in some way he must have been concerned in an attempt to carry off Cecilia Chaumpaigne, presumably for the sake of securing her in marriage for a friend. This, if conceded to be the fact, will strike most of us now as a sufficiently serious offence, without insisting upon the poet's commission of a felony.

For that matter, however, an abduction for the purpose just stated would have been a proceeding in full

harmony with the spirit of the time. Mention has already been made of the fact that Chaucer's own father was carried off by violence at the age of fourteen for the purpose of bringing about a marriage between him and a relative of one of the abductors. If this could be attempted in the case of a boy, we may feel confident that it was no unusual proceeding in the case of one of a sex less capable of making effective resistance, and easily forced into compromising situations which would render marriage necessary in order to save reputation. As a matter of fact, we know that this relic of the primitive method of securing a wife by capture continued to survive in England down to the middle of the last century, and perhaps later. There was a long period of time in which the life of an heiress had always this element of excitement connected with it that she might at any moment find herself run away with and married against her will. It is a kind of incident which appears not unfrequently in the dead and largely forgotten lighter literature of the eighteenth century. The hero arrives opportunely upon the scene to rescue the heroine from the grasp of the ruthless wooer who is dragging her off to a hated union. One instance of this kind still lives for us in one of the few novels of that period which continue to be printed and read. It is the accidental meeting in the highway of the coaches-and-six of Sir Hargrave Pollexfen, and of the all-accomplished Sir Charles Grandison, that reveals to the latter the fact that the former is making an attempt to carry off by violence some distressed damsel, who turns out to be the faultless and unparalleled Harriet Byron; and in this

way is brought about the conjunction of the two most depressingly perfect beings to be found in the whole range of creative fiction.

In introducing into their work incidents of this kind the novelists of the last century, therefore, were not depicting anything unreal. The periodical literature of that time records occasional abductions of this sort. Many of these there must have been of which nothing was publicly said by those immediately concerned. These would find it incumbent upon them to make the best of a bad bargain, and would consequently keep all information about the event from a press not as yet alive to such opportunities nor fully penetrated with the idea that life was lived mainly for the sake of having itself chronicled in the newspapers. There are, indeed, one or two incidents of the kind that are in a measure connected with the history of English literature. Pepys, in his diary for 1665, tells us how, on the night of Friday, the 26th of May, Miss Mallett, the great beauty and fortune of the North, while returning home by coach from an evening entertainment with her grandfather, Lord Halifax, was met at Charing Cross by a party of horsemen and footmen, was forcibly taken from her guardian's protection, put into a coach with six horses, and carried away. Search was immediately instituted. Lord Rochester, who had taken this method of pressing his suit to a successful issue, was captured at Uxbridge and sent to the Tower. At the time Pepys wrote—two days after—nothing had been heard of the lady; but she must speedily have been set at liberty, for not much could be done with an abducted bride whose expectant bride-



groom was shut up in prison. Still such a method of wooing, rough as it seems, must have exercised a certain fascination of its own. In this instance assuredly the offence was forgiven, for early in 1667 the great heiress married the penniless peer.

A somewhat similar story can be told of Fielding, though it was not attended with similar success. While still a boy of eighteen he fell in love with a Miss Andrew, a young lady of great personal and pecuniary attractions, residing at Lyme-Regis, in Dorset. Her uncle and guardian, a certain Mr. Tucker, apparently designed the heiress for his own son. He naturally did not look favorably upon the pretensions of the future novelist, who thereupon began a series of energetic operations to attain his object which would have done credit to one of his own heroes. With the help of his servant he sought one Sunday, according to local tradition, to carry off the young lady by force while she was on her way to church. There is also another story that the guardian, when riding out with his niece, was in the habit of carrying with him a blunderbuss to protect her from the designs of her suitor. Whatever may be the truth as to these details, it is evident that this urgent kind of courtship, whether actually resorted to or not in this particular instance, was something that was always anticipated and dreaded. Mr. Tucker certainly felt it necessary to summon this enterprising lover before the mayor of the place, where he made a formal complaint that he was in fear of bodily hurt, and even of his life, at the hands of Fielding and of his man. He therefore prayed to have him put under bonds to keep the peace; and the official

records of Lyme-Regis for November 14, 1725, show that this was accordingly done.<sup>1</sup>

There is no intention of implying from these instances that men of letters as a class are specially addicted to this method of securing wives for themselves or for their friends; only that from their celebrity as writers the memory of escapades of this character, in which they are concerned, is much more likely to be preserved. If transactions of such a nature could take place in the eighteenth century, we can feel perfectly justified in asserting that they were altogether more common in the fourteenth.<sup>2</sup> Nor was society likely then to look upon the act with the reprobation with which it would be viewed now, though the law may have frowned upon it just as sternly, and punished those taking part in it just as severely. In this particular case there is, with our present knowledge, no ground for maintaining that Chaucer, even if he were guilty of any offence at all, was guilty of any greater one than of being concerned directly or indirectly in an abduction. From whatever he did, he received a release, which could not legally have been given had the case involved a felony. Nor did it in any way affect his position and the estimation in which he was held. In fact, the years that immediately followed are, to all outward appearance, the most prosperous of his life. He was made the recipient of additional favors and privileges. In 1386 his good fortune may be

<sup>1</sup> Austin Dobson, in letter to London *Athenæum* of June 2, 1883. See, also, *Athenæum* of June 16, 1883, p. 762.

<sup>2</sup> "The entry *raptus heredis*" \*\*\*

is \*\*\* "a frequent one in the Records of Edward the Third's time." (F. J. Furnivall [?]) in 'Fresh Facts in Chaucer's Life.'—London *Athenæum*, December 20, 1873.

said to have culminated in his election to Parliament as one of the knights of the shire for the County of Kent. This choice must of itself be regarded as sufficient evidence that he was reckoned as belonging to the class of superior gentry, and probably that he was in possession of property lying in Kent. The position assuredly would not have been bestowed upon a man of little consequence. Testimony that this must have been the case is furnished by the act of the 46th of Edward III., which forbade the return of certain persons as knights of the shire. "But the king willeth," concludes the statute, "that knights and serjeants of the most worthy of the county be hereafter returned as knights in Parliament, and that they be elected in full county."

The Parliament to which Chaucer was elected met at Westminster on the 1st of October, 1386, and did not sit after the 1st of November. It may be worth noting that the Close rolls of the reign of Richard II. record the payment to Chaucer and his colleague of their expenses in going to and returning from this session, and also of their expenses during their attendance upon its proceedings. We know too little of the secret history of the dissensions that prevailed at that period, or of the real designs of the various factions that came by turns to the front, to be certain whether the political influences that were then in operation were favorable or harmful to the poet. On the surface, they seem to be the latter. His patron, John of Gaunt, "the time-honored Lancaster" of Shakspeare, had sailed in August of that year to Spain in the wild expedition to prosecute his claim to the crown of Castile. The Parliament was un-

der the control of the adherents of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, the youngest son of Edward III. The regency that was established by it practically reduced the king's authority to nothing. In the course of the session a commission was appointed to inquire into the state of the subsidies and customs. It is possibly nothing but a coincidence, but it is a fact that, in December of that year, Chaucer had lost his two controller-ships. Of the significance of the fact we cannot be sure. The posts may have been given up of his own accord, or he may have been displaced from them by the will of others. If the latter, the removal may have been owing to the course he had taken in Parliament; or it may have been the necessity of rewarding some partisan whose influence was more to be regarded; or, again, it is possible, though exceedingly improbable, that it may have been due to actual mismanagement of the affairs of his office, either on his own part, or on the part of subordinates for whom he was responsible. The only thing of which we can be certain is that there is nothing certain beyond the fact itself.

It is much the most reasonable supposition, however, that he lost his place in consequence of the prevalence of a political faction to which he was not attached, and to which he may have been actually opposed. At any rate, so long as the power of the Duke of Gloucester was in the ascendant, he held no position under the government. The little light, accordingly, that official records of this kind shed incidentally upon his life is now for a while lacking. Were it not for his pensions, the poet would vanish entirely from our knowledge for



more than two years. It is possible that during this interval he was straitened in his means. It is certain that on the 1st of May, 1388, his two pensions of twenty marks each were cancelled at his own request, and were assigned by him to one John Scalby, about whom nothing is known.

It was at a great council held in May, 1389, that Richard II. put to his uncle, the Duke of Gloucester, the famous and startling question in regard to his age.<sup>1</sup> "How old am I?" asked the king. When he learned that he had passed his twenty-third year, he came to the conclusion that he was now able to govern the realm himself without the aid of tutors. Gloucester retired to the country. The monarch chose ministers and counselors more congenial to his feelings. It may, again, be nothing but a coincidence, but it is none the less a fact that immediately upon the heels of this political revolution followed Chaucer's appointment to a position under the government. There seems, indeed, no reason to doubt that the poet was a favorite of the pleasure-loving court. A king who could urge Gower to write, who was much pleased when Froissart brought him a beautifully illuminated book, because it treated of affairs of love, was not likely to be wholly indifferent to the claims of the greatest literary genius in his realms. In a reign where the interests of the whole people were steadily unheeded it was not, of course, to be expected that the interests of any individual would be long steadily regarded. But the same caprice which at times neglected

<sup>1</sup> Richard born April 3, 1366.

the poet would at other times befriend him. One noticeable circumstance there is also in connection with this change of administration which very probably has a direct bearing upon Chaucer's welfare. Henry of Lancaster, the son of John of Gaunt, had been one of the king's opponents; but he had now come to occupy a chief place in his favor, and was one of his trusted counsellors.

On the 12th of July, 1389, Chaucer was made clerk of the king's works at the palace of Westminster, at the Tower of London, at the castle of Berkhemstead, the king's manors of Kennington, Eltham, Clarendon, Sheen, Byfleet, Childern Langley, and Feckenham, at the royal lodge of Hatherbergh in the New Forest, at the lodges in the parks of Clarendon, Childern Langley, and Feckenham, and at the Mews for the king's falcons at Charing Cross. On the 12th of July of the following year he received the further appointment of clerk of the works for St. George's Chapel, Windsor. The records preserve the accounts of various outlays made by him in the discharge of these duties. They show, in particular, that in May and October, 1390, scaffolds were erected under his supervision for the king and queen and ladies of the court to see the jousts at Smithfield. During this same year he met with an adventure of a kind which entered so frequently into the experience of our ancestors that, without at least one of them, the life of a man of position could hardly have been deemed complete. On the 6th of September he was robbed twice, and each time by the same gang of highwaymen—once at Westminster and once at Hatcham, near "the foul oak." The

amount taken on the two occasions was nearly twenty pounds, and with it was carried off the poet's horse, besides other property. By a writ dated January 6, 1391, he was discharged from repayment of the money stolen.

His appointment, in March, 1390, on a commission to repair the roadways along the Thames has already been mentioned.<sup>1</sup> But both his other positions were lost or given up in 1391. On the 17th of June he was succeeded as clerk of the works at Westminster by John Gedney; and on the 8th of the following July by the same person as clerk of the works at St. George's Chapel. The usual ignorance exists as to the real causes of these changes, and it is but a waste of time to suggest possible ones. It is not simply that there are not enough data upon which to base a reason, there are hardly enough upon which to base a suspicion. There is no ground to attribute the loss of this office or of any of the previous ones to dissatisfaction with the manner in which its duties had been discharged. While it may have been the case, there is not the slightest evidence that such was the case. Even were we to assume, what we do not know, that in each instance he was actually dismissed, instead of resigning of his own accord, the political contests of the times would furnish a satisfactory explanation of his dismissal, without having recourse to a theory of his incompetency which is utterly at variance with all the known facts of his life. His frequent employment in negotiations which were not directly in the line of his regular duties is itself presumptive proof of

<sup>1</sup> See page 37.

the respect paid to his abilities. Nor would his loss of any one position be regarded as furnishing testimony to the contrary, since it was within a short period almost invariably followed by his assignment to another. In fact, so far as can be gathered from the obscure annals of the time, the poet's fortunes to a large extent rose and fell with the influence of the house of Lancaster in the management of affairs.

For the few years that follow the summer of 1391 there has existed until recently an almost complete blank in our knowledge of the poet's life. A little light has been shed upon this obscure period by the discovery, or, at least, by the rediscovery, in 1886, of the fact that somewhere during the fourteenth year of the reign of Richard II.—that is, between June, 1390, and June, 1391—Richard Brittle and Geoffrey Chaucer are recorded as having been made foresters to the North Petherton Park in Somersetshire.<sup>1</sup> This appointment came from the Earl of March, who was grandson of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, and of his wife, that Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster, to whose household the poet had been attached during a part of his early life. In 1398 he was appointed sole forester by Eleanor, the Countess of March, or reappointed as such according to the views of those who hold that he had all along been in exclusive possession of this position. It is a circumstance that bears upon the relationship existing between the two

<sup>1</sup> Made by Mr. Walford D. Selby, who found it in Collinson's 'History of Somersetshire' (1791), vol. iii., p. 62, and communicated it to the London *Athenæum* of Nov. 20, 1886.

Mr. Selby informs us that he owed his information to the antiquary, Mr. William Floyd, who also discovered the deed relating to Cecilia Chaum-paigne.



men that in the fourth year of Henry V. Thomas Chaucer received this post. Who held it between the poet's death and this latter time does not appear.

No further notice of Chaucer occurs until the 28th of February, 1394. On that day he received from the king a grant of a pension of twenty pounds a year for life. Could we only be sure that it was toward the close of 1393 that the poetical epistle to Scogan was sent, we might naturally conclude that this addition to his income was due to the friend whose intervention he had sought. The relief, however it came, seems certainly to have been needed. There is every appearance that during the years that followed Chaucer felt more or less the pressure of limited resources. Several times he drew portions of his pension in advance. It was in 1398 that his pecuniary troubles seem to have been at their height. On the 4th of May of that year he received letters of protection from the king to the effect that whereas he had appointed his beloved esquire, Geoffrey Chaucer, to perform many arduous and urgent duties in various parts of the realm of England, and whereas the said Geoffrey feared that he would be molested and hindered in the execution of his duties by his enemies through the agency of suits of various kinds, he the king in answer to his petition, that he should come to his aid in this matter, took him, his men, lands, rents, property, and all his possessions under his special protection, and forbade him to be sued or arrested for the space of two years on any plea except that connected with land.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rymer's *Fœdera*, vol. viii., p. 39.

This is not in itself certain proof of his poverty. Letters similar in their nature were often given to men in the service of the state, and it may be that this owed its existence to that reason. But other evidence confirms the view that in this instance it was issued for the relief of a man in necessitous circumstances, and not for the accommodation of one engaged in the performance of the king's duty. On the 13th of October of the same year the poet petitioned his sovereign for letters-patent to enable him to receive a hogshead of wine yearly during life at the port of London, and he asks the favor "for God's sake and as a work of charity."<sup>1</sup> The application was immediately granted. It is a possible thing that the letters of protection just mentioned were asked for in consequence of the fact, which the De Banco rolls show, that at the Easter term of 1398<sup>2</sup> a certain Isabella Buckholt, administrator of Walter Buckholt, Esq., sued Chaucer for a debt of fourteen pounds and twenty-three pence. The poet could not have made any answer on this occasion either in person or by representative, for the sheriff's return was "*non est inventus*." This was followed by the usual writ of exigent—that is, a writ requiring the sheriff to have the defendant summoned in five county courts successively to give himself up under penalty of outlawry if he failed to appear. In consequence of the issuance of the letters of protection it would be reasonable to suppose that officers of the court were not very assiduous in looking up the poet, and it may not therefore be surprising that the same return of

<sup>1</sup> "Pur Dieu et en ouere de charitee." Communicated by Mr. Selby to the London *Athenæum*, Jan. 28, 1888. p. 116. <sup>2</sup> April 24 to May 20.

"*non est inventus*" is made at the Trinity term of 1399.<sup>1</sup> After that date there is no further mention of the suit on the rolls.<sup>2</sup>

This grant of a tun of wine a year was to begin from the 1st of December, 1397, and was to be continued during the term of his life. Both it and the issuance of letters of protection are two of many evidences which show that Richard II. was far from unfriendly to the poet. Yet, for all that, a change for the better in his fortunes came with the deposition of the reigning monarch and the accession of Henry of Lancaster to the throne. The half-serious, half-humorous 'Complaint to his Purse' may have been written any time during the last decade of the fourteenth century. One at least of the manuscripts represents it as sent to Richard II. But the language of the envoy can apply to only one man, and that was Richard's successor. It reads as follows:

"O conqueror of Brutès Albión  
Which that by line and free electiön  
Be very king, this song to you I send:  
And ye that mowen<sup>3</sup> all my harm amend,  
Have mind upon my supplicatiön."

Henry IV. is the only monarch of whom the words "by line and free election" could have been spoken. He was, as a matter of fact, chosen king by the Parliament, though he challenged the crown on the score that he was descended from Edmund Crouchback, an alleged eldest son of Henry III., whose claim had been set aside

<sup>1</sup> June 4-25.

<sup>2</sup> London *Athenæum*, Sept. 13, 1879, p. 338.

<sup>3</sup> Are able to; may.

in favor of Edward, the younger son, who ascended the throne as Edward I. Accordingly, at whatever time the poem itself may have been written, the envoy that was appended to it could only have been added on the occasion when it was sent to the new monarch. The aid, whether asked for then or not, certainly came, and came quickly. Henry was declared king on the 30th of September, 1399. Four days after, on the 3d of October, a grant of forty marks yearly was made to the veteran poet, in addition to the pension of twenty pounds given by Richard II. in 1394. The records make known that copies of both these grants were lost soon after by Chaucer, and that in this same month he was furnished with new ones. Nothing can show more clearly how little it is we know of the real man that scholars have been reduced to see in the accidental disappearance of these documents a possible significance which may give some indication of his character.

The rapidity with which this gift followed upon the accession of Henry IV. to the throne seems almost to suggest a close personal tie between the monarch and the man of letters. In those days of hurly-burly and confusion there must have been matters in themselves far more important, and demanding more immediate consideration, than the pension of a poet. There must also have been clamorous followers to be rewarded, with whom Chaucer's claims could not for a moment come into comparison. Still, it may have been nothing more than a token of personal regard, and perhaps of literary appreciation on the part of the king. It was, indeed, not long after that he bestowed a similar mark of favor upon



Gower, who had been one of his staunchest adherents. It may again have been nothing more than a due recognition of a tribute of admiration which Chaucer had previously paid, though for obvious reasons the personal application had not been directly indicated. We do not know the date of the composition of the prologue to the 'Canterbury Tales.' But it is certainly a possibility, perhaps a plausible supposition, that in drawing the character of the Knight the poet had partly in view the son of his old patron. Henry of Lancaster was early renowned for his enterprise and martial skill. In his youth he had taken an active part in the operations that went on during the Middle Ages of turning inoffensive heathen into rather savage Christians. The effort to convert these consisted largely in carrying to them the Gospel at the point of the sword and placing before them the alternative of being exterminated or of being saved in spite of themselves. This naturally came to be a favorite occupation with men fond of military adventure, who were willing to do everything for Christianity except, perhaps, to live according to its precepts. Enterprises of this sort certainly attracted at the outset the attention of Henry of Lancaster. In 1390, at the age of twenty-four, he had fought against the Mohammedans of Barbary. In 1391 he engaged in the conduct of missionary operations of a similar nature against the pagans who dwelt on the shores of the Baltic. There his religious zeal was characterized by the usual practices, and was followed by the usual results that then attended the operations of the church militant. We are told by Thomas of Walsingham that with the help of the Marshal of Prussia he

conquered the army of the King of Lettowe, took prisoner four Lithuanian leaders, besides several thousand private soldiers, and, of course, left a respectable number of the enemies of the true faith dead upon the field. Subsequently he captured the city of Wilna, but was unable to reduce its castle. The actual result of this missionary work, as told by the historian, makes it plain that many had to be killed in order that a few should be converted; which indeed seems to have been the mediæval interpretation of the text that many are called but few chosen. According to his account of this religious campaign, several thousand were slain, several thousand were carried into captivity, and eight were made Christians.<sup>1</sup>

Henry of Lancaster also started on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, though he got no farther than Rhodes. It is possibly noteworthy that while the future king was absent from England on these expeditions, Chaucer either lost or gave up the positions under the government to which he had succeeded in 1389. We cannot assume that this is anything more than a mere coincidence, especially as during this last-mentioned year John of Gaunt had returned to the country on the summons of the king. But if the fortunes of the House of Lancaster had any influence upon the poet's, it would almost inevitable tend to make him idealize the character of the man who was destined in the course of nature to be its representative, and in whose future his own would be more or less involved. No one will indeed pretend that

<sup>1</sup> Thomas of Walsingham's *Historia Anglicana*, vol. ii., p. 197. (Rolls Series, London, 1864.)

the portrait drawn in the prologue of the Knight—who is specially celebrated as fighting for the Christian faith—can have been designed even remotely as a representation of the deeds of Henry IV. The events in which the former is described as sharing happened before the latter was born. Still it is conceivable that in the portrayal of the character Chaucer may have had in mind the son of his patron, upon whom had been fixed, long before he came to the throne, the hopes of the party discontented with the profligacy and misgovernment of Richard II. The view can only be taken for what it is worth. In the matter of positive evidence there is nothing in favor of it that is entitled to the name.<sup>1</sup>

The poet did not live long to enjoy the new day of prosperity that appears to have dawned with the accession of the House of Lancaster. On the 24th of December, 1399, he leased a tenement in the Garden of St. Mary's Chapel, Westminster, for fifty-three years or "less, if he dies sooner." Whether we regard him as now approaching the age of sixty or seventy, this seems a sin-

<sup>1</sup> The view may receive a sort of support, however, from the statement about the knight in the prologue that he was "a worthy man." The adjective is usually explained as "brave;" sometimes as "worthy" in the modern sense. Either meaning is entirely unsuitable. It can only mean in this place "of high rank." In the description which follows of the knight it is also said,

"And though that he was worthy, he was wise,  
And of his port as meek as is a maid."

There is no necessary contrast between courage and wisdom, still less between worthiness in the modern sense and wisdom. Chaucer here

means to contrast the high rank of the knight with the affability of his manners. There is in his deportment nothing of the arrogance often seen in men of noble birth or exalted position. This same signification of social elevation implied in the word "worthy" is frequent in Chaucer, and I only note it here because it is not noticed in the glossaries. The friar, for instance, in this same prologue, is well-beloved and familiar with "*worthy* women of the town." The Wife of Bath also is described as having been "*a worthy* woman all her life." A large number of additional illustrations of this usage could be given.

gular lease for a man so advanced in years to make. The fact alone we know: the reason for it, whether connected with himself or others, we are never likely to know.

His end, however, was not far off. On the 21st of February, 1400, he drew his pension in person. On the 5th of June, however, a portion of the pension given him by the reigning monarch was drawn for him by another. This is the last mention of him that occurs. After this his name appears no longer on the pension rolls, which more than most of the documents furnish us with the knowledge of the fragmentary unconnected facts which, in the lack of anything better do duty as the story of his life. There is, therefore, no reason in this case to doubt the accuracy of the inscription on his tombstone, which represents him as having died on the 25th of October, 1400. It is also altogether probable that he died at the very house which he had leased so short a time before. He was buried in the great cathedral near which, in his last days, he lived. He was the first certainly, and for centuries continued to be, the only one of the long line of men of letters whose mortal remains have found their resting-place in this great mausoleum of the illustrious dead of England.<sup>1</sup> In 1556 a tomb of gray marble was erected near his grave by Nicholas Brigham, a man of letters, and a special admirer of the poet. Chaucer's arms were inscribed upon it, and also the following epitaph:

<sup>1</sup> Dart, in his 'History and Antiquities of Westminster Abbey,' p. 85, says that Chaucer "was buried before the Chapel of St. Bennet, where his stone of broad gray mar-

ble, as I take it, was not long since remaining: but was taken up when Mr. Dryden's monument was erected and sawn to mend the pavement."



M. S.

Qui fuit Anglorum vates ter maximus olim,  
GALFRIDUS CHAUCERUS conditur hoc tumulo:

Annum si quæras Domini, si tempora vitæ  
Ecce notæ subsunt, quæ tibi cuncta notant.

25 Octobris 1400.

Ærumnarum requies mors.

N. Brigham hos fecit musarum nomine sumptus  
1556.

The date of the death is supposed to have been taken from some older tombstone which had been placed over the poet's remains. The inscription on the present one has now become nearly obliterated, and the crumbling marble affords no longer a vestige of the whole-length portrait of Chaucer, taken from Occleve's picture, which had been once delineated upon it.

The questions connected with the poet's family relations present as many difficulties and vexed points of controversy as the questions connected with the leading events of his life. They need to be considered, even though they cannot be decided. The main facts we possess in regard to the matter can be given briefly. The first is the question of his marriage. On the 12th of September, 1366, a pension for life of ten marks a year was granted to a Philippa Chaucer, one of the ladies of the chamber to the Queen of England. On the 24th of May, 1381, Richard II. confirmed the pension, as is revealed by an issue roll of that date. More than the fact of confirmation, however, is revealed by this document. It adds that on this occasion she received the money through the hands of her husband

Geoffrey. These two records, therefore, enable us to assert that the Philippa Chaucer who, in 1381, was the poet's wife, was granted the same amount of money for the same services to the same person on the same grounds, and held precisely the same position at the court as the Philippa Chaucer who was pensioned on the rolls of 1366. There can consequently be hardly a question of the identity of the two. No one, so far as I am aware, disputes it. This identification disposes at once of the theory, once held, that the poet's wife was a certain Philippa Pycard, who was also an attendant upon the queen of Edward III. This was first suggested by Tyrwhitt as probable, and by Godwin, according to his usual custom in such cases, asserted as a fact. Modern investigation has besides discovered for this maid-of-honor a probable husband in a Geoffrey Pycard, who at the same time was in the service of the court. She seems, indeed, to have been selected as the poet's wife mainly, if not entirely, on the ground that she had the same baptismal name as the person mentioned in the rolls; but we may rest assured that in those loyal days, when a Philippa was Queen of England, her namesakes abounded in the land.

Philippa Chaucer remained in the queen's service until the latter's death. This took place in 1369. She went then, apparently, into the service of Constance of Castile, the second wife of John of Gaunt. From him, in 1372, she received a pension of ten pounds a year. This is the grant already referred to, which Sir Harris Nicolas thinks was commuted in 1374 for an annuity for the same amount for life to be paid to her and her

husband.<sup>1</sup> In this latter document she is described as the wife of Geoffrey Chaucer. Her name occurs several other times in the records, but these proofs of her existence add nothing further to our knowledge of her identity. She is mentioned for the last time in the issue rolls of 1387. On the 18th of June of that year her pension is drawn for her by her husband. As, from that date, all notice of her disappears from the records, it is generally conceded that she must have died not long after.

The natural, the almost unavoidable inference from these facts is that Chaucer was married certainly before September, 1366, and that his wedded life must have extended at least over twenty years. So early a date, however, for having taken to himself a wife clashes at once with a theory already mentioned,<sup>2</sup> based upon a few lines in the 'Death of Blanche,' that, for the eight years previous to 1369, he was engaged in making desperate love. Marriage before 1366 might not conflict, indeed, with the occupation; but it had the necessary effect of imparting a terrestrial alloy to the heavenly purity of his passion. Godwin, who was the first to broach a notion of this sort, illustrated the moral benefits of ignorance in his treatment of the subject. He was unaware of the Philippa Chaucer of 1366, and of her being then, or of her having become, the poet's wife. More merciful than those who in modern times have adopted the same theory, he fixed upon Philippa Pycard as the lady, and made the long-drawn-out love-suit successful

<sup>1</sup> See page 63.

<sup>2</sup> See page 59.

at last. This resource is denied to recent writers who have adopted this method of explaining words whose meaning no man knows, and probably no man ever can know. To save the character of the poet they are obliged to resort to another expedient. Philippa Chaucer is his relative, probably a cousin with the same family name. He is not married to her in 1366, but some time after 1369, when he has given up all hope of securing the beautiful and high-born maiden for whom he has so long been pining. The utter absence, not merely of evidence, but of anything even remotely resembling evidence, is one obstacle that would interfere with any permanent acceptance of this view. The state of things it supposes is of course possible; but that is the best that can be said for it. The chances are altogether against its being true. One further consideration is also to be taken into account in connection with the attempt to make the marriage of Chaucer take place at a comparatively late period in his life. If Thomas Chaucer were his son, such a view becomes at once grossly improbable, if not actually impossible. That person, whether the poet's son or not, must have been born some time before 1369 in order to receive the positions and attain the station he is credited with having held before the end of the century.

But who was Philippa Chaucer? Was she the daughter of Sir Payne Roet, Guienne King of Arms, who came over from Hainault with the queen of Edward III.? If so, Chaucer's wife was the sister of Katharine, the widow of Sir Hugh Swynford, who was the mistress, and, in 1396, became the third wife, of John of Gaunt. In this way the poet would be brought into a sort of connection



with the royal house of England. A direct statement that this was the fact was first made in the life prefixed to Speght's edition, published in 1598. As a proof of it there was printed in that volume a pedigree furnished by Robert Glover, Somerset Herald, a man whose professional reputation stood very high. But the document is not altogether satisfactory. It is noticeable that in it the name of the daughter and co-heiress of Sir Payne Roet, who is said to have become Chaucer's wife, is not given. We are expressly told, indeed, that it is not known. This may be regarded as positive proof that, so far as this particular marriage is concerned, the pedigree does not rest upon documentary evidence. However learned an antiquary Glover may have been, it is obvious that he had no official record of the marriage, or he would have furnished it.

Still the statement of Speght has been accepted with little hesitation until a very late period. It was adopted without question in the biography of the poet prefixed to Urry's edition. The cautious Tyrwhitt did not deny it. Godwin, who was always positive in proportion to his ignorance, was particularly vehement in its support. Even Nicolas, who was extremely careful in the sifting of evidence, went so far as to declare that it scarcely admitted of a doubt. On the other hand, there are modern scholars who distrust it, and some who unhesitatingly deny it. As the matter is inextricably mixed up with the question of the relationship that existed between Thomas Chaucer and the poet, its further consideration may well be deferred until that question comes up for discussion.

Chaucer may have had several children; but of one only do we know with certainty. The name seems not to have been uncommon at the time, and several persons possessing it have been fancied to be of his blood. There was an Elizabeth Chaucer who was nominated by Richard II. immediately after his coronation, in 1377, as a nun of the Priory of St. Helen's, London. There was another Elizabeth, for the expense of making whom a novitiate in the Abbey of Berking, in Essex, John of Gaunt paid more than fifty-one pounds in 1381. About these we have no information beyond the facts just recorded. But from the unimpeachable testimony of Chaucer himself we learn of a son Lewis. Still, of his existence we should not have the slightest inkling had not paternal affection induced the father to prepare or, rather, to translate, a text-book for his instruction. This is the treatise, left unfinished, on the 'Astrolabe.' At the time the work was written we find from it that the boy was of the age of ten. As certain of the calculations contained in this treatise are designed for the year 1391, its composition has generally been ascribed to that year. This, however, cannot be regarded as anything beyond a probable inference. If it be assumed as a fact, it would make the son, for whose sake the book was prepared, the child of Chaucer's later life. In that case it would be natural to infer that other children had been born before; but it is hardly reasonable to credit him with the fathership of all the Chaucers whose names happen to be preserved in the records of that time. Several of these persons have been discovered, and more are likely to be. They may have stood in near or remote

relation to him; but the tie that existed between them and him, whatever it was, has never been ascertained.

It is in his introduction to the treatise on the 'Astrolabe' that Chaucer mentions his child by name, and gives the reasons that induced him to set about the composition of the work. There is a sweetness and simplicity in the words with which the great poet addresses the boy which reveal a depth and tenderness of feeling that might fairly have been inferred from his writings, but could never have been known with certainty. "Little Lewis, my son," he writes, "I have perceived well by certain evidences thine ability to learn sciences touching numbers and proportions; and as well consider I thy busy prayer in special to learn the treatise of the 'Astrolabe.' Then, forasmuch as a philosopher saith, he wrappeth him in his friend that condescendeth to the rightful prayers of his friend, therefore have I given thee a sufficient astrolabe as for our horizon, compounded after the latitude of Oxford: upon the which by mediation of this little treatise I purpose to teach thee a certain number of conclusions appertaining to the same instrument." He then goes on to say that he shall state some and not all the conclusions of the 'Astrolabe,' on account of the tender age of the child; and for this same reason he puts the rules in English, "for Latin ne canst thou yet but small, my little son." Toward the conclusion of the address he quaintly apologizes for the faults that may be found with his work. "Now will I," he says, "pray meekly every discreet person that readeth or heareth this little treatise to have my rude enditing for excused and my superfluity of words, for two

causes. The first cause is for that curious enditing<sup>1</sup> and hard sentence<sup>2</sup> is full heavy at once for such a child to learn. And the second cause is this that soothly me seemeth better to write unto a child twice a good sentence than he forget it once. And Lewis, if so be that I show thee in my light English as true conclusions touching this matter, and not only as true, but as many and as subtle conclusions as be showed in Latin in any common treatise of the 'Astrolabe,' con me the more thank;<sup>3</sup> and pray, God save the king, that is lord of this language, and all that him faith beareth and obeyeth, everich<sup>4</sup> in his degree, the more and the less."

Of the fate that befell this child we are in complete ignorance. All that is known about him is contained in this brief passage. But there is another person whose relationship to the poet has been, and still continues, a theme of controversy. This was Thomas Chaucer, a man of some importance in his day. He filled various positions of trust and profit. He was a member of several parliaments. He was more than once speaker of the House of Commons. In particular he held the post of chief butler to Richard II. and to the monarchs who succeeded him. He became some time in the last decade of the fourteenth century the husband of Matilda, the second daughter and co-heiress of Sir John Burghersh. By this marriage he acquired large estates, one of which was that of Newelm or Ewelme, in Oxfordshire. In 1411 he received from the queen a gift of several manors, and among these was that of Woodstock.

<sup>1</sup> Elaborate composition.

<sup>3</sup> Feel under greater obligation to me.

<sup>2</sup> Sense, matter.

<sup>4</sup> Each one.



He died in 1434, possessed of great wealth. It was Alice, his only child, who married for her first husband Sir John Phelip; and Sir John Phelip was the owner of Donnington Castle, near Newbury, in Berkshire. It was this same daughter who married for her third husband William de la Pole, Earl and afterward Duke of Suffolk, who was beheaded in 1450. Their eldest son, John de la Pole, married a sister of Edward IV. The first-born son of this union was created Earl of Lincoln during the lifetime of his father, and was declared by Richard III. heir-apparent to the throne in case of the death without issue of the Prince of Wales. He fell in 1487 at the battle of Stoke.

No reader of the common accounts of Chaucer's life needs to be told that all these statements about estates and descendants have been made again and again in connection with the poet himself. Especially is this true of the residences with which he has been furnished by his biographers. No records, title-deeds, documents of any sort, no contemporary testimony derived from any quarter, ever associated him with either of the two habitations that have just been mentioned. There is no evidence that he ever dwelt a day at Woodstock, or that he ever saw Donnington Castle. The house which bore his name in the former place, the tree in the latter under which he is reported to have been in the habit of sitting, may possibly, and even probably, have been the home and the haunt of Thomas Chaucer. But there is no foundation in the knowledge that has come down to us for the assertion, so constantly made for centuries, that Geoffrey Chaucer spent no small portion of his life, especially

of his later life, at one or both of these places. In this matter the two personages, whether holding or not the relation of father and son, came early to be confused, and the confusion continues to prevail largely to this day.

A question now arises more difficult to settle than that of residence. Was Thomas Chaucer the poet's son? This has been a subject of controversy for centuries, and we are perhaps not much nearer certainty now than were the men of three hundred years ago. Leland, the first biographer, knew nothing of any other son than Lewis. Not much can be inferred from his silence, for, as it will be seen later, he did not know much of anything connected with Chaucer, and what he thought he knew was almost invariably wrong. But the words of Speght in the life of the poet prefixed to the folio of 1598 show that this very matter was then under discussion. He himself states unqualifiedly that the relationship was that of father and son. But he gives us to understand that there were those who did not accept this view. "Some hold opinion," he wrote, "but I know not upon what grounds, that Thomas Chaucer was not the son of Geoffrey Chaucer, but rather some kinsman whom he brought up." The biographer, however, relied for the truth of his statement upon the pedigree already mentioned as prepared by Robert Glover. According to it the poet not only married the sister of Katharine Swynford, but had Thomas as a son; indeed, he is the only child the Somerset Herald condescends to mention. The same evidence, accordingly, that makes him the husband of the one, makes him the father of the other. The two relationships are bound together, as it seems, indissolubly.

In the difficulty of arriving at absolutely certain conclusions upon this point, all that can be done is to present the arguments that have been advanced on both sides. But at the very outset it is proper to say that the evidence is strong, if not conclusive, that the mother of Thomas Chaucer was a Roet, whoever was his father. The arms of that family were adopted by him in place of his own, and they occur repeatedly upon his tomb. Upon his tomb also were placed the arms of many descendants of John of Gaunt by Katharine Swynford. His relationship to the royal family may be likewise regarded as supported by a passage which occurs in a holograph letter written to Henry IV. by his son, the Prince of Wales. It was dated at Waltham, the 6th of June, and though no year is mentioned, it contains references that show it belongs to 1402. In it there is mention made of his cousin Chaucer, who it is to be presumed is the Thomas Chaucer of whom we are speaking. "Beseeching you, my sovereign lord," writes the prince, "to have in your noble remembrance, with what conclusion of rest I departed last out of your gracious presence, and after that I have demeaned me sith I came into this your realm, and with God's grace shall to my life's end, like as I trust to God, your humble liegeman, my cousin Thomas Chaucer, hath plainly informed your highness ere this time."<sup>1</sup> The wide variety of senses in which the word "cousin" was then and afterwards used

<sup>1</sup> Fac-similes of National MSS., photo-zincographed by direction of the Master of the Rolls. 1865. No. xxxvii., p. 40. The facts in regard to this letter were first noticed in

an article entitled 'More News of Chaucer,' by Mrs. H. R. Haweis, which appeared in *Belgravia* in the number for July, 1882.

forbids our attributing to its appearance here the weight which it would necessarily carry now in a document of this character. The same term was employed by the Prince of Wales when speaking of others. Unless, therefore, it can be shown that it invariably implied some degree of relationship, even though very remote, it is unsafe to draw certain conclusions from premises so uncertain. Still it is to be said that if Thomas Chaucer was the son of the sister of Katharine Swynford, he was in one sense a cousin of the king himself and consequently of his son. The application to him of the term in this letter would therefore accord fully with the facts about him given in the pedigree furnished by Robert Glover, so far as his mother is concerned.

It does not necessarily follow from this, however, that Thomas Chaucer was the son of Geoffrey. There were pretty surely others of the same family name flourishing at that time. Still, two pieces of evidence have been discovered of late years that prove, or seem to prove, that such was the precise character of the relationship that existed between the two. An imperfect seal of Thomas Chaucer attached to a deed preserved among the miscellanea of the Queen's Remembrancer of the Exchequer has on it the coat of arms assigned by tradition to the poet, and bears the legend of S HOFRAI CHAUCIER.<sup>1</sup> The first letter of the Christian name has disappeared. Mr. Hunter, who discovered the document in the Record office, was positive that it should be read

<sup>1</sup> See Mrs. Haweis's article entitled 'More News of Chaucer,' which contains a representation of the seal of John Chaucer, and also of this seal of Thomas Chaucer which has just been described.



S GHOFRAI CHAUCIER, that is, the "seal of Geoffrey Chaucer," and that it was used by the son in the absence of his own, as in the document itself he declared it to be his seal. Evidence of this sort can hardly be deemed highly satisfactory. It depends, among other things, upon the assumption that the missing letter, of which we know nothing, was G, and not some other. Moreover, the traditional coat-of-arms assigned to the poet may have had for its original the coat-of-arms of Thomas Chaucer, just as from the estates of the same person came his traditional residences.

Evidence far more convincing than this, however, has lately been pointed out. It comes from one who was almost a contemporary of Geoffrey, and was a contemporary of Thomas Chaucer. Thomas Gascoigne, who died in 1458, just twenty-four years after the death of the latter, left behind him a Theological Dictionary, which still exists in manuscript in the library of Lincoln College, Oxford. In the course of it he discusses repentance that comes too late to undo the evil that has been wrought by the deed for which contrition is felt. Judas Iscariot is his first example, and Chaucer, of all men, is his second. The poet he represents as often crying out on his deathbed: "Woe is me, woe is me, because I shall not be able to recall those things which I have wickedly written concerning the wicked and most disgraceful love of men to women! Would I could recall them! Would I had not written them!" With these lamentations in his mouth he died." Here that which follows is for us the really important part of what Gascoigne has to say. "This same Chaucer," he con-

tinued, "was father of Thomas Chaucer, armiger, who was buried at Newelm, near Oxford."<sup>1</sup> The significance of this testimony cannot be gainsaid. It is that of one who not only flourished at the time, but also dwelt near the place. Gascoigne was most of his life a resident of Oxford, and was several times chancellor of the university. Woodstock and Ewelme are both but at short distances. It is carrying distrust very far to suppose that in a matter of this kind any mistake could have been made.

Yet there are those who hold the opposite view in regard to the relationship under consideration. A great deal has been said, and perhaps is still justly to be said, in denial of the fact. Even with this last piece of evidence, strong as it apparently is, fault can be found. Gascoigne's eager and unquestioning acceptance of what may confidently be regarded as idle gossip about the poet's dying hours, if not a malicious concoction, denotes in him the existence of that inaccurate habit of mind which renders all testimony coming from such a source suspicious. His assertion upon this point is based primarily upon the famous retraction at the end of the 'Canterbury Tales.' But the regret expressed in that short piece has been so expanded and exaggerated and aggravated that the poet, if he were really the author of that passage, or even if he merely authorized it or some-

<sup>1</sup> These facts were communicated in a letter from Mr. John W. Hales to the London *Athenæum*, which was published in that periodical in the number for March 31, 1888. The last passage containing the reference

to the parentage of Thomas Chaucer reads in the Latin original as follows: "Fuit idem Chawserus pater Thome Chawserus, armigeri, qui Thomas sepelitur in Nuhelme juxta Oxoniam."

thing like it, would hardly have recognized it in the form in which it has been handed down to us by Gascoigne. There are, besides, serious difficulties involved in the assumption of the particular relationship that has been supposed to exist. It seems hard to believe that the poet could have been in pecuniary straits, if not in actual penury, in his old age, while his son was holding honorable and lucrative positions under the government. It is full as hard to believe that Thomas Chaucer could have been celebrated in verse as he was without having any reference made to his father. Before his death he came to be a man of wealth and estimation. Yet a relationship to the famous author so close as that of son, if such were the fact, must even then have been in the eyes of many a principal, if not the principal, distinction he enjoyed. Yet outside of the incidental remark of Gascoigne just quoted there has not been discovered so far the remotest allusion to the existence of such a tie. That no reference to the fact should occur in official documents, or even should appear on his tomb, may not be deemed strange, or, at any rate, incapable of explanation. But Lydgate sang the praises of Thomas Chaucer. In so doing he never once hinted that any connection existed between him and the great author whom he himself looked up to as the chief glory of Britain. The suppression of a fact is ordinarily no proof of its non-existence. But there must be conceded a certain measure of significance to the suppression of such a fact in a poem, coming from the man it did, and addressed to the man it was. For Lydgate had previously taken the pains to assure us that he should never omit an opportunity to express his admi-

ration of the poet he recognized as his master. In his 'Troy Book' he spoke of him as the chief writer,

"That ever was yet in our language;  
The name of whom shall pallen in none age,  
But ever alike without eclipsing shine;  
And for my part I will never finé,<sup>1</sup>  
So as I can, him to magnify  
In my writing plainly till I die."

It is a natural presumption that he who could utter words such as these would not be likely to refrain in a poem that celebrated the son from making some allusion to the far more famous father, if relationship of that sort existed.

This is essentially the line of reasoning that has been adopted by those who argue against the belief that Thomas Chaucer was the son of Geoffrey. The subject is certainly attended with difficulties whichever view we take. Some of them have perhaps had a stress laid upon them to which it may turn out upon fuller examination they are not justly entitled. There does not seem to be much if any evidence that Thomas Chaucer was in a position to furnish pecuniary assistance to any one during the lifetime of the poet. It was not until very late in the reign of Richard II. that he is reported to have been made his chief butler.<sup>2</sup> He does not appear to have been a man of much wealth before his marriage. While that may have taken place before the end of the century, it does not yet seem to be established

<sup>1</sup> Cease.

<sup>2</sup> I am unable to find any record of the date of this appointment,

though it must be well known. In 1402 he was appointed chief butler for life to Henry IV.



that it took place much before the close of its last decade. If such should turn out to be the case, any argument from his supposed neglect of his father can hardly be entitled to consideration. On the other hand, a number of circumstances that stand in the way of the full acceptance of the commonly received theory of the relationship between the two men are fairly and honestly stated by Nicolas, stanch believer as he was in the pedigree furnished by Robert Glover. "It is rather singular," he wrote, "if the poet were so closely connected with a personage of such exalted rank and immense power as John of Gaunt, that he should not have attained a higher station in society; and it is still more remarkable that the name of Chaucer does not occur among the numerous individuals whom the duke mentions in his will; nor is it to be found in the printed wills of any member of the House of Beaufort, to all of whom a descent from the sister of Katharine, Duchess of Lancaster, would have rendered Thomas Chaucer the first or second cousin. Moreover, Thomas Chaucer would, like Sir Thomas Swynford, have been entitled to his mother's inheritance in Hainault, if she had been one of the coheir-esses of Sir Payne Roet; but nothing has been discovered to show that he asserted a right to any lands in that province." These are illustrations of the various kinds of perplexities that now beset the whole question. It is not impossible that it may be settled beyond possibility of doubt by further discoveries either among the records or in contemporary notices. Here it is perhaps unsafe to say more than this, that in the light of our present knowledge kinship of some kind must have

existed between Geoffrey Chaucer and Thomas Chaucer. This may or may not have been that of father and son, but the weight of evidence at present is strongly in favor of that particular relationship.

At this point another doubtful matter presents itself for consideration. It has of late become a common assertion that Chaucer's married life was unhappy. All conclusions of this kind must be based upon statements made by the poet himself, for there are no contemporary references of any sort to the subject. Two passages in his works are the only ones to which any real weight can be attached in this discussion. One of these is a poem addressed to Bukton, in which he denounces marriage, though he confesses he dare not write of it as he had promised, for fear that he himself might fall again into "such dotage." The passage, however, on which special stress has been laid occurs in the 'House of Fame.' The poet represents himself as having been carried up so high by the eagle of Jove that between astonishment and dread his senses were almost gone. From this dazed state he tells us in the following words how he was awakened:

"Thus I long in his clawès lay:  
Till at last he to me spake  
In mannès voice, and said, 'Awake!  
And be thou not aghast, for shame!  
And callèd me tho<sup>1</sup> by my name.  
And for I should the bet abraid,<sup>2</sup>  
Me met,<sup>3</sup> 'awake' to me he said,  
Right in the samè voice and steven,<sup>4</sup>  
That useth one I couldè never<sup>5</sup>;

<sup>1</sup> Then.<sup>2</sup> Awake.<sup>3</sup> I dreamed.<sup>4</sup> Voice.<sup>5</sup> Name.

And with that voice, sooth for to sayn,  
My mindè came to me again,  
For it was goodly said to me,  
So was it never wont to be."

This passage is a striking illustration, in the use to which it has been turned, of the way in which inferences drawn from Chaucer's writings have been made to furnish us the form of knowledge without its substance. Upon these lines practically rests most of the broad assertion about the unhappiness of the poet's married life. Yet we are entirely ignorant of who the person was the writer could but does not choose to name. It may have been his wife; again it may not. Let it be conceded, what can never be proved, that she is the one to whom allusion is made. Even then the passage establishes nothing. If it even suggests anything, it is the opposite of the meaning that has been attributed to it. These lines are unmistakably pure banter—banter doubtless understood at the time, but which possesses for us no longer its original and special signification. If the words are spoken of his wife, it is banter of a not very refined but still sufficiently common sort. It belongs in that case to the same species of jocoseness which leads husbands to stigmatize jestingly wives conspicuous for amiability as domestic tyrants and household furies. To attach a serious meaning to these lines would render it necessary for us to revise our whole conception of the poet's character. From the little we know of his life and from a great deal we find in his writings, we recognize him plainly as a man of the world in the best sense of a much-abused phrase. He had all that tendency to

self-revelation in unimportant matters and to reticence in important ones which distinguish the men of his kind. We can be certain that he was not one to wear his heart upon his sleeve, not one to take the world into his confidence in things wherein it had no concern, or to parade before it his domestic grievances, if any he had.

Nor can any references made by Chaucer to the female sex—and they can be found both for and against them—be reckoned in any case as satisfactory evidence upon either side of this question. Attacks on women and marriage formed a staple subject. The practice was specially indulged in by the monkish writers who had the best of reasons for decrying a state from which they were debarred. To speak ill of woman was largely a literary fashion, which asceticism with its gross view of married life had done all it could to bring into being and to keep in vogue. It usually meant then no more than it does now. By those writers in particular who did not belong to the clerical body it was rarely anything more than the conventional utterance which was in full accord with the literary traditions in which they had been brought up. No one felt himself specially responsible for raillery and denunciation in which all who wrote took part. The literature of the Middle Ages abounds in invectives of this character, which are often mere intellectual exercises, and in no sense expressions of personal feeling or opinion. There is, for instance, a ballade of E. ache Deschamps, the matter of which consists of nothing more than variations upon the theme that the man who marries a second time shows by that very fact that he is a



fool.<sup>1</sup> Chaucer's epistle to Bukton is weak in comparison. Even were the poet's references to the female sex more pronounced and one-sided than they actually are, it would still be practically impossible to say in any given case whether he spoke personally or professionally. If, indeed, we had no other evidence to rely on save that furnished by English literature, it would be difficult to prove that for a number of centuries there was in England any such thing as that wedded bliss which modern authors have so rapturously celebrated. Domestic happiness was not a subject which attracted the attention of the literary or scholastic class in Chaucer's time. Philosophers did not reason about it; poets did not sing it; priestly writers sneered at the life which nourished it as distinctly inferior to celibacy. It was not essential, however, to its all-sufficingness that it should be widely talked about; it was not necessary to its security or permanence that eulogies should be written upon it. We need not doubt of its existence, though it took no pains to flaunt its joy in the face of the public or to record it in song. The currents of human life ran just as freshly and powerfully in the fourteenth century as now, and human feeling then was just as intense and deep, though it had few of the means and nothing of the desire to make itself visible in the light of day, or audible through the thousand voices of the press.

In the foregoing pages will be found all of importance that is now known of England's first great poet. The scantiness of the information will not strike the student of literature with surprise. It is indeed far fuller than

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres Complètes d'Eustache Deschamps*, vol. iii., p. 54.

that possessed of many eminent men who flourished much later. Moreover, great as Chaucer seems to us, there must have been thousands among his contemporaries whose social estimation was higher. There must have been hundreds whose achievements would have seemed to them more worthy of narration. The experiences of many were without doubt altogether more eventful. Little there could have been in the poet's career to make an exciting story. This certainly has a compensation of its own. Lives of men of letters, which are interesting to others to read about, are apt to be woefully lacking in interest to those who have to lead them. But if his career was not especially eventful in itself, it was cast in an eventful time. It was coeval with the brilliant reign of Edward III. and its inglorious close; with Cressy and Poitiers; with the terrible ravages of the Black Death; with the premonitory throes of the Protestant Reformation; with the accession to the throne of a boy whom Langland had welcomed with the prophetic cry, "Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child;" with the great insurrection of the peasantry; and with the deposition of a rightful monarch, which must have shocked profoundly the loyal sentiment of the time. These are occurrences all of which have an interest of their own, and some of them a very special interest. Yet none of them make the fourteenth century so attractive in our eyes as the existence of Chaucer himself. He is the central figure in a period adorned with some great names and crowded with many great events. Time has amply avenged any social depreciation he may have suffered, if such there were. The world which celebrated

or neglected him now lives for us mainly in his verse, and reaps from his lines the harvest of whatever appreciation it bestowed.

But if it be not unexpected that there should be little to tell, it may not have been expected that so much time and space should have been taken in the telling of it. That is, however, the hard necessity which forces the biographer to substitute for the short and simple statement of known facts a protracted discussion of probabilities as to what the facts are. The knowledge we possess, such as it is, has been derived from the public records almost exclusively. It has been gained at the cost of long and arduous toil on the part of men who have with unselfish devotion given themselves up to a task of peculiar drudgery. It is from these sources and in this way that the details have been gathered which make up what we call the life of Chaucer. Without the information thus acquired he would be to us little more than a name. Not all of these records have as yet been examined. There is, accordingly, little room for positive assertion on many points. It is possible that any day new discoveries may be made which will upset all the most reasonable conclusions that have been drawn from the scanty knowledge we already possess. They may cast additional light upon the poet's career, or they may impart perplexity to the precise significance of facts previously supposed to be clearly understood. The arduous task of searching these records has been performed by a succession of scholars from the sixteenth century down to our own time. Much has been discovered during the last twenty-five years; and though there have been other

workers in the field, the most valuable results have been largely secured by the indefatigable labors of Mr. Furnivall, the director of the Chaucer Society, and of Mr. Selby, of the Public Records office. A statement of the work done and remaining to be done is given by the latter in his account of the robberies of Chaucer, the material of which was furnished by the examination of the *Coram Rege* and *Controlment* rolls. The documents from which most would naturally be expected were the Patent, Close, and French rolls, the Issue rolls of the Exchequer, the Chancery miscellaneous rolls, and the wardrobe accounts of the Duchy of Lancaster. These furnished mainly the references which were printed or utilized by Godwin and Nicolas in their biographies of the poet. "Though from this," adds Mr. Selby, "it would appear that all the most productive sources of information have been exhausted, still there are vast collections of records which remain to be examined; that they should have been left untouched can hardly be wondered at, if we consider the dubious chance of success, and the time which would be required to complete such a task. Almost any class may contain important notices, and consequently an exhaustive search which should include every document falling within the period of Chaucer's life can be the only means of making sure that we know all that can be known about him."

There is one curious fact which the examination of the records discloses, so far as it has gone. Chaucer, as we are aware, held various positions in the civil service. Page after page of official documents must have been written by him with his own hand. His signature must



have been appended to many hundreds of them, probably to many thousands. Yet not the trace of a line which he wrote can now be discovered. Not an autograph of his exists. Such a state of things could clearly not have been the result of accident. "Every single original document," writes Mr. Furnivall, "drawn up and signed by Chaucer has disappeared from its proper place. Some one who knew the records thoroughly has systematically picked out—probably scores or hundreds of years ago—all Chaucer's work from every set of records, and either stolen or tied them up in some bundle which may be among the unindexed Miscellaneous Records."<sup>1</sup> The latter is too pleasing an alternative to be considered among the possibilities.

A few particulars that have been unearthed from these records have been passed over without mention in this account of Chaucer's life. They consist mainly of accounts of receipts and disbursements, or of details connected with the discharge of his official duties. They are naturally neither entertaining nor significant. These epithets are often not applicable to the facts that have been given. We may well be glad that these are as numerous as they are; we can feel grateful for the patient and disinterested labor that has brought them to our knowledge. Yet their discoverers would be the first to acknowledge how scanty they are in their sum, how barren they are in the information they yield. All they can do for us was indicated at the outset. They inform us to some extent of the nature of the business in which

<sup>1</sup> London *Athenæum*, Nov. 29, 1873, p. 698. No signature attached to the communication.

Chaucer was at various times engaged. They give us occasional glimpses of his movements. But of the real life he lived, of all those details which go to make up our impression of individual character, no trace can be found in these juiceless disclosures of an official past. They never show us the man behind the functionary, they never flower into incident or break out into personal revelation. For any light upon what the poet really was, the utmost we can hope for is to draw inferences from utterances of his own which can never be interpreted with absolute certainty in our ignorance of the circumstances under which they were made.

Scanty, however, as are these records to any thorough knowledge of his character, there are one or two things about him that they do serve to make so clear that any permanent misrepresentation is impossible. Whatever misfortunes may have clouded his latter days, it is plain that during most of his career Chaucer was a successful man, as the world commonly rates success. In an age when blood and birth counted for far more than they do now, the vintner's son easily triumphed over the accidents of family and station. He became the associate of nobles, he stood high in the favor of princes. We are not likely in these days to place upon the appreciation of such men too extravagant an estimate. The hold he has upon us is not due to honors it was in their power to bestow. Yet as a proof of the possession of abilities of a certain order, its value will be conceded by all now; while at the time it inevitably brought with it a consideration for the man which could never have been gained by the qualities for which we cherish his memory. In the good

fortune of his social and political career, these records, barren as they are of information more important, furnish us plenty of grounds for belief. For the higher success which came to him as a man of letters we have naturally to go to other sources of information. These, in turn, if not full in their details, are fully satisfactory in the testimony they present. Here it was not equality with some that he reached, but superiority over all. The references of contemporaries, the tributes paid to his memory by his immediate successors, give ample assurance that in his own time his literary supremacy was unquestioned among the men of his race; and that his literary greatness was even then recognized in foreign lands, wherever any faint knowledge of English letters had begun to penetrate. He did not have to wait for the tardy justice of posterity to bestow an appreciation which his own age had refused to grant. Sought or unsought, regarded or slighted, it came to him in abundance during his life.

More marked, in addition, than any political or social success that he achieved is another fact about him which these records bring to light. The first great poet of our literature was in an eminent degree what in these days would be called a practical man. The places he held, the various duties he was called upon to discharge, show that he was one whose business qualifications were recognized by those highest in rank and position, and whose power to select was limited only by their disposition. The point needs to be insisted upon emphatically, and even at the risk of repetition; for of late a tendency has occasionally manifested itself to give as a reason for his

changes of office, dissatisfaction on the part of others with the way in which he had performed the duties intrusted to his charge. To a suspicion of this kind—for no one will pretend that any proof exists—the evidence of nearly his whole life furnishes an ample corrective. Chaucer may have been corrupt. Any one who is so disposed is at liberty to take that view. But he was most assuredly not incompetent. Men—at least men of inferior birth—are not kept in public office for more than thirty years, and constantly assigned to various delicate and difficult duties, if they are conspicuous for their inefficiency. Chaucer's loss or abandonment of one position was generally followed by his speedy appointment to another. It is not reasonable to suppose that the recommendation which led to his being chosen to do the business of some new post was that there had been a great deal of business in his old one to which he had never attended. That in his latter days he was for a while straitened in his means can be admitted. This experience can hardly be regarded as exceedingly singular. Other cases have been known where men have been temporarily unfortunate without its being found necessary to charge them with incapacity.

The choice of the poet for the positions he filled may do more than merely shed light upon his character, or the qualifications he brought to the discharge of the duties to which he was assigned. It may explain a result for which reasons of all sorts have been given. Chaucer's was no life of studious leisure. His was not one of those careers in which undistracted attention could be given to the work upon which for the time being the



thought or fancy happened to be fixed. The composition of his writings, as well as his reading and study, must often have been done in the intervals between enforced and regular labor—in occasional breathing-spells in the hurry of business in which he was absorbed. It is no improbable supposition—and probability is the only region in which the biographer of Chaucer can be said to feel fairly at home—that the incompleteness which attends his works was due to the urgency of duties he could neither shun nor slight. Whatever view we may take of this explanation as accounting for the fragmentary state in which the poet's writings were largely left, we certainly cannot doubt the existence of the pressure upon his time which makes such an explanation possible if not plausible.

The constant employment of the poet in duties which demanded the exercise of executive as well as in those which required intellectual ability does more than dispose of the charge of inefficiency. It is a fact worth noting in the light of much that is widely said and accepted about the literary character. If there is one lesson to be learned from the little we know of Chaucer's career, it is the vanity of the popular belief that represents an irrepressible conflict as inevitably existing between the man of letters and the man of business. We need not shut our eyes to the prevalence of this opinion. Especially is it found among those whose lives have been spent in callings the regular routine of which gives great efficiency within narrow limits, but narrows in turn the capacity of judging others save by their familiarity with this routine. With persons of this class, who proudly

assume the title of practical men, the reputation of literary ability is unquestionably damaging. In their view the man who writes is lost, at least if he writes well. The existence of imagination on any high scale is satisfactory evidence to them of the absence of rationality. Yet it is hardly the mere fact of authorship that lowers their estimate of the writer as a man. It is only against those who are liable to the reproach of being entertaining or inspiring that prejudice of this sort is directed. No one ever suffered from the publication of a book in the opinion of so-called practical men, provided the subject discussed by him was generally uninteresting, or his treatment of it was especially dull. With them there is always a tendency to confound stupidity with solidity, and to give the author credit for judgment in exact proportion to his tediousness; for literary heaviness is something which the practical man comprehends clearly and usually illustrates admirably whenever he himself has occasion to resort to the expression of his ideas in writing.

There is, however, some justification for these believers in the theory that the road to wisdom lies through the avenue of dulness. Among men of letters, as among men of every profession, there are always to be found some whose minds are unbalanced, and whose conduct is erratic, if not worse. They invariably display that diligent disregard of their duties which seems often to have the singular effect of causing others to look upon them as for that very reason men of genius, and of exciting feelings of peculiar consideration and tenderness in their favor on the part of those who are suffering from

the consequences of their neglect. Unlike similar persons in other professions, however, they have repute enough to cause their failings to become widely known. Their conception of duty as a thing the performance of which is to be carefully avoided is consequently transferred in the minds of many from them, of whom it is true as individuals, to the whole class to which they belong. To the charge against men of letters, which owes its origin to the contemplation of such characters, the career of Chaucer presents a complete answer. That he should have devoted himself largely to a life of business activity was unquestionably a necessity of his situation. Literature, however attractive as an avocation, would have been then, even more than now, a melancholy vocation. But the record of his employments gives no countenance to the belief that the gift of inspiration is purchased by the sacrifice of any capacity for the discharge of those practical duties which are essential to the well-being of the home and to the well-ordering of the state. The first great poet of our literature in point of time, and among the very first in point of genius, was one who was constantly employed in matters which imply the possession of all the qualities that distinguish the man of affairs from the mere man of letters. There is every evidence in the long continuance, the variety, and the importance of the services he rendered that thoroughness and efficiency must have been brought by him in a high degree to the work of the widely differing occupations in which he was concerned. He certainly never pleaded the possession of poetic gifts as an excuse for neglecting the most prosaic of employments. He stooped without re-

monstrance to the performance of petty tasks, he bore without complaint the drudgery of ever-recurring trivial duties. The sanity of his acts was the fitting counterpart of the sanity of his writings. His spirit, even if wearied, was never weighed down by the necessity, which presses heavily upon us all, of bearing the burden of the commonplace. No more than for Shakspeare or Milton do we have to apologize for Chaucer on the ground that, being a genius, he was incompetent to perform the ordinary duties of life, or that, being inspired, he was unwilling to discharge its ordinary obligations.



## II.

### THE CHAUCER LEGEND



## THE CHAUCER LEGEND.

THE potential mood has at last disappeared from English grammar; but it still continues to work havoc in English literature. Especially is this the case in the biography of our earlier writers. Little is known of what actually took place in their lives; we are therefore furnished instead with what may, can, or must have taken place. Flight of time and frequency of assertion give authority in their turn to the most unfounded conjectures. Under the pressure of constant repetition guesses harden into positive statement. Where nothing is definitely known, a possible story through the agency of successive writers comes at last to be treated as a probable one. The transition from probability to fact is then a journey that is speedily made.

To the biography of no English writer has this process been applied more thoroughly than to that of Chaucer. In the case of no other has it been attended either with ampler or with falser results. All of the least importance that is positively known of the poet's career has been told in the pages which make up the preceding chapter. Even of that far the larger part has been devoted, not to the recital of undoubted fact, but to the discussion of vexed and still unsettled questions. Much also of the

little that we now regard as certain has been brought to light within a few years past. Yet what men know now about him forms but a small part of what they once thought they knew. By the contributory labors of several successive biographers there was long ago created a thoroughly wrought-out and well-fabricated life of Chaucer which had everything to recommend it but the element of truth. It was based upon surmises which had been made in the first instance without much judgment and had come to be repeated without the least critical examination. Its details were collected by taking passages from the poet's writings, or writings supposed to be his, wrenching them from their context, and piecing them together. A constructive narrative was in this manner fashioned of what might have happened to Chaucer, but so far as we know never happened to anybody at all. Yet the story thus evolved was accepted with little question for nearly two centuries. It is, moreover, far from having died out entirely. Even at this day its inaccurate and often conflicting assertions can be met everywhere in popular literature, and are still to be found in common and in a few cases in valuable books of reference.

It will be the object of the present chapter to trace the genesis, growth, and overthrow of the Chaucer legend, with the various phases it assumed at various times, its precise record of impossible events, its contradiction to the facts of history and its contradiction to its own facts. This will involve some accounts of his earlier biographies and biographers. The latter have been a somewhat peculiar class of men in literary history. They seem to have lacked utterly the censorious and along with it the criti-



cal faculty—which, indeed, by many are thought to be one and the same. Not one of them ever made a disparaging reference to a predecessor, or cast a suspicion upon his statements wherever it could be avoided. Unlike the commentators of Shakspeare, whose apparent aim is often not to illuminate the author, but to expose the incapacity of previous editors, the biographers of Chaucer have handed down from one to another the ever-swelling volume of conjecture with no expression of doubt or denial, contenting themselves merely with contributing some additional surmises of their own. Certain details, indeed, that were found in the first accounts of the poet's life were necessarily sloughed off in the development of the story. But they were always abandoned reluctantly. They were only given up when their retention implied the existence of a state of things that was not within the range of possibility. All these particulars will appear in their proper place as we trace the growth of the legend and its progress towards acceptance as fact.

No life of Chaucer appeared during the fifteenth century. The first account ever given of him was the production of Leland; and as that antiquary died in 1552, a good deal more than a century must have gone by after the poet's death before this sketch of his career could even have been taken in hand. It is, what it has just been called, a sketch, and nothing more. It was contained in a work which set out to furnish lives of all the writers who had flourished in Great Britain from the earliest times. These biographies were written in Latin, and they were never printed till the year 1709, and then most carelessly. But Leland's collections, while still in

manuscript, furnished a body of material which later compilers consulted or plundered at will. In particular, his literary history, if one can so call it, was essentially included in the similar works of Bale, bishop of Ossory, and of John Pits, the dean of Liverdun. The former in its complete form was printed at Basel in 1557-59. The latter did not appear till after the death of its author, which took place in 1616. It was published at Paris in 1619.

The information contained in each of these three bulky collections is of a kind rather to surprise than to instruct. The reader will discover from them that the literature of Great Britain goes back to a period long anterior to that produced in any other country. He will make in them the acquaintance of a large number of authors whose names he has never met with before, and outside of these volumes is never likely to meet with again. The one desire that animated all these compilers seems to have been to include as many persons as possible in their lists. Obscurity of antiquity did not hide any from their search, nor could uncertainty of legend save them from mention and description. Men were included for no other reason than that they were reported either in fact or fable to have spent some time on what is now English soil. Thus Bale begins his catalogue of the illustrious writers of Great Britain with Samoths Gigas, who flourished shortly after the deluge. Later in his list can be found Joseph of Arimathea. Pits, more moderate, begins his account with the year of the world 2879, and gives as the first of British writers the mythical Brutus, who, we are told, wrote originally in Greek certain letters to the equally mythical king Pandrasus.

The foregoing details about these collections have been given in order to make clear what must have been the critical character of their compilers, and because the authority of these men is often quoted with a respect which it requires absolute ignorance of their writings to acquire and maintain. In this chapter it is necessary to speak at length only of Leland. Bale's account of Chaucer is little more than a condensation of what is to be found in the earlier author, and Pits here as elsewhere pillaged Bale. The additions which the two later writers made to the original narrative are few in number and slight in importance. The original narrative has, moreover, an interest peculiar to itself. It is the first life of the poet. It is the source to which many of the statements commonly made about Chaucer can be traced. Yet it has never been much read and is now little known; for it has always been practically inaccessible to the vast majority of students. It seems desirable, therefore, that in this work it should be given essentially in its entirety. In these pages, therefore, that immediately follow, it will be found for the first time, so far as I know, in an English translation.

"Geoffrey Chaucer, a youth of noble birth and highest promise, studied at Oxford University with all the earnestness of those who have applied themselves most diligently to learning. The nearness of that institution was in a measure the motive that induced him to resort thither; for I am led by certain reasons to believe that Oxfordshire or Berkshire was his native county. He left the university an acute logician, a delightful orator, an elegant poet, a profound philosopher, and

“an able mathematician. The last he became through  
“the instructions of John Some, and of Nicolas, a Carmelite friar of Lynn, two men very proficient in  
“mathematics, whom he names in his treatise on the  
“‘Astrolabe.’ Moreover, he left the university a devout  
“theologian. I have certainly made use of strong language; but whoever has turned over his books with a  
“curious hand will have no hesitation in declaring me a  
“reporter who can be trusted. Nevertheless, I shall  
“frankly admit that while he so applied himself at Oxford, he also pursued his studies elsewhere, and by long  
“devotion to learning added many things to the knowledge he had there accumulated. It is a settled fact  
“that about the last years of Richard II., to whom he  
“was personally not unknown, he resided in France. There he acquired for himself great glory by his assiduous practice of literary composition. He gained  
“more than glory. He imbibed at that time through  
“this same practice the charm, the humor, the delightfulness, the wit, in fine all the graces of the French  
“speech, and imbibed them to such a degree as is hardly  
“to be believed. Praise of this sort followed Geoffrey  
“upon his return to England, as if it were an inseparable  
“attendant upon his excellence. Rejoicing, therefore,  
“in successes of this kind, he resorted regularly to the  
“London tribunals and the inns of court occupied by  
“the lawyers who were there engaged in interpreting  
“the laws of their country. This perhaps he had done  
“before he visited France.

“In those times the most celebrated man among the  
“advocates was John Gower, whose life we have already



“written. He was a man of reverend age and was taking wonderful pains to polish the English tongue. No sooner had he perceived and proved the genius and worth of Chaucer than he made of him an intimate friend, took him to his embrace, looked upon him as one of his noblest delights—in short, honored him almost as if he were some divinity. Let this not rest upon my authority. Gower himself, in his work which bears the title of ‘Amantis,’ makes abundantly evident how high was his estimation of Chaucer. In addition to praise most intelligently bestowed, he calls him a distinguished poet, and constitutes him a sort of Aristarchus for his own labors. Behold for thyself, O reader, a most beauteous contest of virtue! For as Gower, a man claiming little for himself, modestly submitted what he had done to the judgment of Chaucer, so in turn Chaucer referred the ‘Loves of Troilus’ to the criticisms of Gower and Strode. Who this Strode was I have thus far been unable to learn from any author. But though he is mentioned by no one else, I remember to have read creditable things of a certain Strode, an alumnus of the college of Merton at Oxford, as one most learned in poetry. He is enrolled in the catalogue of Merton College in the last years of Edward III. So much is evident from the lines of Chaucer that he had been a student of philosophy. Add at this point that just as Chaucer was at the same time an admirer and an imitator of Gower, so Scogan, a man given to all sorts of jocoseness and wit, whose monument stands in Westminster Abbey, was likewise an admirer and imitator of Chaucer. But, on

“the other hand, by how much the disciple Chaucer was  
“greater than the master Gower, by so much was Scogan  
“inferior to Chaucer.

“Now, indeed, the order of our discourse demands that  
“we show clearly what aim Geoffrey had in view in his  
“studies. Assuredly it was a peculiar one. It was to  
“render the English speech as polished as possible in  
“all respects. He had observed that in this very matter  
“Gower had made excellent progress. Therefore he  
“thought that no stone should be left unturned by him-  
“self in order to reach the farthest goal of success. And  
“since poetry had always pleased him above everything  
“else, he devoted himself to it with ardor, he cultivated it  
“religiously. It seemed to him that through its agency  
“it was most easy to lay open the path to the very  
“heights of expression. For poetry is of such a nature  
“that it not only admits of figures, of graces of style,  
“of ornaments of speech, of richness of language, and  
“of whatever is attractive and delightful; it even de-  
“mands these as of right belonging to itself. Add to  
“this that he called in to take part in his work the Ital-  
“ians and the French who wrote in their own tongues  
“very many things with purity, beauty, and elegance.  
“So great a thing is it to have renowned leaders to  
“follow. About that time Petrarch flourished with  
“fame in Italy, and by his labors the common speech of  
“that land was brought to such a point of refinement  
“that it vied with Latin itself for the palm of eloquence.  
“A certain Alain also polished the French tongue in an  
“infinite variety of ways. Each of these two—for I omit  
“many others of greatest note who did the same things—

“added a spur to the efforts of Chaucer, who was sufficiently inclined of himself to press forward. It was under favorable auspices, therefore, that he applied himself to the work he had undertaken. Sometimes he turned into the speech of his native land works composed carefully, ornately, and eloquently in the French tongue. Sometimes he translated Latin verse into English, but with learning, with skill, with harmony. Sometimes he committed to writings destined to survive many original things which equalled the happiest success of the Latins. Sometimes he strove with all his power to instruct the reader, and again took pains as sedulously to give him pleasure. Nor did he cease from his labors until he had carried our language to that height of purity, of eloquence, of conciseness and beauty, that it can justly be reckoned among the thoroughly polished languages of the world. Therefore it is that in my book of ‘Epigrams’ I soar in the following verses to his glory.”

At this point Leland breaks out into verse. He inserts in his narrative three Latin poems, which abound in praise of the poet, but which naturally do not convey much information even of the kind that he has already given. The first of them is to the effect that as Florence celebrates Dante, and the whole of Italy Petrarch, so all England venerates Chaucer as the one who before any one else gave beauty to his native tongue. In the second he compares him to Homer and Virgil, and says that while happy ages gave birth to these two, it was the fate of the English poet to be born in a rude and turbulent time. Had he lived in an age when the Muses

flourished, it is hinted that he would have equalled or excelled the greatest of the past. Then follows the third poem, which consists of some hendecasyllabics which Leland tells us he had composed some years before at the request of Thomas Berthelet, a most painstaking and learned printer. In this he renews the statement of Chaucer's services to his native tongue, likens him to Hesperus among the lesser stars, and ends by enjoining the youth of Britain to scatter with joyful hand—presumably upon his tomb, though that is not mentioned—the fragrant rose and the more delicate violet, and bestow upon their poet the ivy crown. He then returns to his subject with a slight apology for the display he had made of his own literary powers.

“But now,” he goes on, “we have served up to you “enough of our trifles. It is not a man of his quality “who can obtain his due praises from the commendation of any muse of mine. Oh, at the hands of an “impartial judge how much more speedily will he gain “just applause from his own works. I would, therefore, “that our tongue were familiar to the Latin poets. Then “easily I say, easily would they come into my opinion. “But since I am wishing for what can hardly happen, I “should like them to be prevailed upon so far as to have “in this matter some faith in me as a lover of Latin “literature. Under that encouragement I shall not feel “it a burden to give the titles of his productions in “Latin. In this way they may be able, as it is said “in the proverb, to form some judgment of the lion “from his claws.

“And yet before I undertake that which I have just



“now promised, it will not be foreign to my purpose  
 “to speak publicly of William Caxton, a man who was  
 “lacking neither in diligence nor learning. He, as is  
 “well known, was the first to practise the art of print-  
 “ing at London. The works of Chaucer, so far as he  
 “could gain possession of them by buying or begging,  
 “he collected in one volume. Nevertheless, our Ber-  
 “thelet has surpassed this edition of Caxton through  
 “the exertions of William Thynne. The latter em-  
 “ployed much labor, zeal, and care in searching diligent-  
 “ly for ancient copies, and added many things to the  
 “first edition. Nor in this matter, moreover, was lack-  
 “ing Brian Tuke, a most intimate friend of my own,  
 “and gifted with wonderful skill in the use of the Eng-  
 “lish tongue. He for the sake of his own glory has  
 “contributed to the last edition an elevated, excellent,  
 “and polished preface. I shall therefore follow the copy  
 “printed a few years since and add the promised table  
 “of contents:

“*Fabulae Cantianae* xxiv. (The Canterbury Tales.)<sup>1</sup>

“Two of these are written in prose. But the Tale of Piers Plow-  
 man, which by the common consent of the learned is attrib-  
 uted to Chaucer as its true author, has been suppressed in  
 each edition, because it vigorously inveighed against the bad  
 morals of the priests.

“*De Arte Amandi*, alias *Romaunce of the Rose*.

“*Amores Troili et Chrysidis*, lib. 5. (Troilus and Cressida.)

“*Testamentum Chrysidis*, et ejusdem lamentatio. (The Testa-  
 ment of Cressida and her Complaint.)

“*Amores Heroidum*. (The Legend of Good Women.)

<sup>1</sup> The Latin titles are printed in The English titles I have added in  
 that tongue, as given by Leland. parentheses.

- "De Consolatione Philosophiae, soluta oratione. (Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy, in prose.)
- "Somnium Chauceri. (The Death of Blanche the Duchess.)
- "Chorus Avium. (The Parliament of Fowls.)
- "Flos Humanitatis. (The Flower of Courtesy.)
- This book is rejected by many as spurious.
- "De Pietate mortua, et ejus Sepultura. (The Complaint of the Death of Pity.)
- "Chorus Heroidum. (The Assembly of Ladies.)
- "De Astralabio ad Ludovicum filium suum, prosa. (A Treatise on the Astrolabe, addressed to his son Lewis, in prose.)
- "Querela Equitis cogn. Nigri. (The Complaint of the Black Knight.)
- "Encomium Mulierum. (A Praise of Women.)
- "De Fama, lib. 3. (The House of Fame.)
- "Testamentum Amoris, lib. 3. (The Testament of Love.)
- "Threni Magdalenae. (The Lamentation of Mary Magdalen.)
- "De Remedio Amoris. (The Remedy of Love.)
- "Querelae Martis et Veneris. (The Complaints of Mars and of Venus.)
- "Epistola Cupidinis. (The Letter of Cupid.)
- "Cantiones. (Minor Poems.)

"Thus far as regards the titles of his works which at the present day are read everywhere. Yet besides those which I myself have recounted, he states in the prologue prefixed to the 'Legend of Good Women' that he had written a little book on the Death of the Duchess Blanche, and that he had moreover translated a short treatise of Origen about Magdalen. This, provided Origen ever wrote any such thing at all, I take to be the same as the 'Lamentation of Magdalen,' which I have mentioned in the list given above.

"Perhaps at this point some will expect me to make an

"end of speaking, but I still have a few things to say  
 "which will greatly commend Chaucer to posterity. For  
 "just as he was well known to Richard of Bordeaux, the  
 "English monarch, and dear to him on account of his vir-  
 "tues, so also for the same reasons he was highly valued  
 "by Henry IV. and by his son, the triumphant victor  
 "over the French. In addition to this, all the nobility of  
 "England looked upon him as the consummate example  
 "of high-wrought expression. It added, moreover, to his  
 "repute that he had a sister who was married to William  
 "Pole—unless I mistake the name—Duke of Suffolk,  
 "and passed her life in great splendor at Ewelme. There,  
 "also, at the will of God, she afterwards passed away, and  
 "there, as I have somewhere heard, she was buried.

"In the midst of these events Chaucer reached the pe-  
 "riod of gray hairs, and found his disease to be old age it-  
 "self. This continued to oppress him more and more, and  
 "while he was attending to his affairs in London he died.  
 "He was buried in Westminster Abbey, in the south aisle  
 "of the church dedicated to St. Peter. He left Lewis as  
 "the heir of his fortunes, whatever they were, and espe-  
 "cially of his villa at Woodstock, adjoining the palace of  
 "the king. Some time after William Caxton caused  
 "this distich to be inscribed upon his monument :

'Galfridus Chaucer vates, et fama poesis  
 Maternae, hac sacra sum tumulatus humo.'

"These two lines were taken from a certain elegy which  
 "Stephen Surigon of Milan, a celebrated poet of his time,  
 "wrote at the request of William Caxton. It is therefore  
 "a pleasure to repeat on this occasion the whole of the

“elegy, for it is terse, flowing, and sonorous. For in this way Chaucer, who was great in himself, will seem greater by the noble tribute paid him by a foreign writer.”

The pleasure which Leland felt in the poem of Surigón will hardly be shared by the modern reader, and the praise bestowed upon him in it will not seriously affect modern judgment. The verses will accordingly be omitted here. With the following reference to them Leland closes his narrative:

“You have now, O most courteous reader, the elegiac lines inscribed on a snow-white tablet which Surigón affixed to the Westminster column adjoining the tomb of Chaucer. May my persuasion and their attractiveness dispose you, whoever you are, to read them often for the sake of our poet.”

So runs the account of the first life of Chaucer that was ever written. Its author is a man whom succeeding antiquaries have delighted to honor. The story of Leland's zeal in collecting and preserving the decaying records of the past has become a familiar part of our literary history. We have all been told how he was armed with a commission from Henry VIII., which authorized him to search after England's antiquities, to visit principal manors, castles, monasteries, colleges, and cities, to examine libraries and all places where the monuments of the past were likely to be deposited or its secrets to be hid; and that after six years spent in this search, and six years spent in the effort to put in order the materials collected in the search, his mind broke down under the burden, and he sank into madness and into the grave. The story is a tragic one; but the work he accomplished



must be judged by its own merits and not by the misfortunes of its author. His topographical collections deserve, perhaps, all the praise which has been given them unstintedly; for they may contain nothing but what he saw with his own eyes or was able to verify upon the spot. But if they exhibit anything like the ignorance, the carelessness, the indifference to accuracy, which mark the sketches given of Chaucer and of Gower, to say nothing of others, later times would have lost little if Leland had never travelled a mile or written a line.

Tyrwhitt has been sometimes taken to task because in several places he spoke in uncomplimentary terms of the so-called life of Chaucer which has just been given. Never was there less reason for censure. Leland was an antiquary who was not content with recording history; he manufactured it, and the products of his invention, accepted as statements of fact, have stood for centuries in the way of investigation. Curiously enough, this result has been largely due to the oblivion that has overtaken the biography he wrote. Leland is, in fact, a shining example of a man who has been saved by the multitude of his blunders. Had merely one or two mistakes marred the general accuracy of his account, these would never have been forgotten by any, and would occasionally have been magnified by some. But they were so numerous that they led in time to the quiet ignoring of the whole narrative in which they were contained. His account of Chaucer came in consequence to be generally forgotten. With it disappeared the memory of its errors and the knowledge of its utter worthlessness. But it left Leland as a name still to conjure by, as an au-

thority still to cite on points where there was nothing to show what was actually true or false.

This is a view of Leland not usually entertained, at least not usually expressed. But his life of Chaucer has been given here; and he who dissents from the opinion now set forth has the means furnished him for forming his own estimate of the value to be attributed to this first biography of the poet. To me it seems that a careful study of it can lead but to one conclusion. Wherever it was possible for Leland to make a mistake of fact he made it; wherever it was possible for him to draw an erroneous inference, he drew it; wherever it was possible for him to give a wrong impression, he gave it. A plea is sometimes set up in his behalf that it is unfair to judge him by the severe standards of exactness prevailing in our day. But accuracy is a habit of mind which existed long before his time, and was as easily attainable then as it was previously and has been since. The claims of it he of all authors had the least right to waive. He was an antiquary. As an antiquary he was privileged to be dull, to be interested in matters no one else cared about; the one thing that was forbidden him was to be inaccurate. Unfortunately, in the biography of Chaucer this is the only thing which he was. When he mentions facts connected with his own time, it need not be denied that his assertions are entitled to consideration. But even then we find that he rarely communicates anything which we should not have known just as well without his help. The sources of knowledge that were open to him are likewise open to us. In certain cases, indeed, we can point out the precise authority upon which he bases his

assertions. These are sometimes of a peculiar interest as regards himself, because they give us a clear conception of what Leland looked upon as evidence and of the magnificent use to which he could put the most trivial piece of information. Chaucer, for instance, in his treatise on the 'Astrolabe' says that one part of the work will contain certain astronomical tables which he specifies, "and many another conclusion after the calendars of the reverend clerks, friar John Somer and friar Nicholas Lynne." On the strength of this simple announcement Leland was enabled to inform us that when the poet left Oxford University, he left it an able mathematician through the instructions of the two persons who have just been named. This is but one of several cases in the sketch he gave of Chaucer's life where a very large body of inference was developed by him from a very limited supply of fact.

But it is not alone in his inferences from facts that the utter untrustworthiness of Leland's narrative consists. The untrustworthiness was as frequently in the facts themselves which he furnished. As, however, his name still continues to be used at times to bolster up fresh conjectures or to revive dead fictions, it may fairly be demanded by the reader, not a specialist in this particular subject, that instances shall be given specific enough and various enough to justify the condemnation which has been passed upon his account of Chaucer. This is not a matter of difficulty. Any failure to substantiate the censure expressed down to the minutest detail will be due not to lack of proof, but to lack of space. Most of these blunders will necessarily be exposed in the

course of the story. Here a few may be mentioned that have perpetuated themselves rather in literary history than in the history of the poet. Leland speaks of Chaucer as having been incited by the example of a certain Alain to attempt doing for the polishing of the English language what the latter had done for the polishing of the French. The Alain who is supposed to have exerted this influence was Alain Chartier. He was but a mere boy when Chaucer died. Again bibliography is peculiarly the province of the literary antiquary; but Leland was as inaccurate in his bibliography as he was in his biography. The same facility in blundering which caused him to make the English poet an imitator of a French one who flourished in the century after him, attended him in his remarks upon books with which it was his business to be specially familiar. He represents Caxton as having collected as far as he could the writings of Chaucer in one volume. This is a book from the press of the first English printer which has never been heard of save on Leland's authority. No library has preserved it, no other writer has ever mentioned it. He followed this statement with an assertion that perplexed or rather confounded bibliographers for generations. Berthelet, he went on to tell us, brought out a completer edition than Caxton's through the exertions of William Thynne. Now not only is there no volume of Chaucer in existence, bearing the imprint of Berthelet, but the volume to which Leland specifically refers and the contents of which he catalogues, and which he must have had in his hands, is dated 1532, and bears on its title-page the name of Thomas Godfray. Later writers,



therefore, who have felt it a matter of conscience to maintain their faith in the old antiquary, have been under the necessity of assuming that Berthelet must have had an interest in this particular work, though it was nominally published only by Godfray. This may be true, and it was pointed out by the late Mr. Bradshaw that the woodcut frame around the title in this volume was the property of the former. Still no such supposition need be resorted to by him who has become familiar with Leland's habit of mind as exemplified in his biography of the poet. It was in 1532 also that Berthelet brought out his edition of 'Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,' and the fact that the works of the two poets came out in the same year would have furnished Leland with a sufficient reason for confounding their publishers.

He is even more grossly at fault in his account of the relations that prevailed between the two writers who have just been mentioned; and the errors he originated on this point have only died out within a comparatively recent period. He speaks of Gower as a man of reverend age while Chaucer was still a youth. He implies that the latter was the disciple of the former, by whom he was preceded in the composition of English verse. He is particular to give as his authority for this the testimony of Gower himself, and specifies the book in which the latter has mentioned Chaucer. The passage is as marked an illustration as could be furnished of Leland's incapacity to comprehend clearly, or at least to report accurately, the meaning of what he had read. It is the Goddess of Love, in the lines to which he refers,<sup>1</sup> who

<sup>1</sup> See page 44, where the passage is given in full.

greeted Chaucer as "my disciple and my poet." It is plain that Leland understood this greeting as having come, not from Venus, but from Gower himself. Upon this misapplication of meaning he builds up a superstructure of fictitious detail and fanciful assertion about both authors which will be searched in vain for a particle of certain truth. We now know perfectly well that if there is any question of precedence between the two in the composition of English verse, it is Chaucer to whom precedence is due; that if there is any charge of imitation to be made against either, it is Gower who was the imitator. Yet the opposite view, based primarily upon the misconception that has just been pointed out, long held its ground tenaciously. The relation of master and disciple between the two poets was a part of the literary creed about them both that held sway until a comparatively late period. The blunder originally made by Leland was reproduced by Bale in still stronger language. In the eighteenth century Johnson gave it new currency and wider vogue in the history of the English language prefixed to his Dictionary. In that he spoke of Gower as having called Chaucer his disciple, and as therefore having a just title to be considered the father of English verse. At a later period he went even further, and put in the great poet's mouth words that can nowhere be found in his works. "In this state," he wrote, speaking of the rudeness of the early literature, "our language may be said to have continued to the time of Gower, whom Chaucer calls his master, and who, however obscured by his scholar's popularity, seems justly to claim the honor which has hitherto been denied him, of show-

ing his countrymen that something more was to be desired, and that English verse might be exalted into poetry.”<sup>1</sup> Johnson, in addition to his other great achievements, was capable of making colossal errors without the slightest help from others; but this is an instance in which he seems to have been misled by the words of the old antiquary, which had reached him directly or indirectly. A greater authority on this special subject than Johnson, and one for whose errors there is far less excuse, repeated the misstatement after the most deliberate fashion. Warton, in his ‘History of English Poetry,’ took the pains to tell us how Chaucer was “countenanced and assisted by his friend John Gower, the early guide and encourager of his studies.”<sup>2</sup>

It is time to pass on to the succeeding biographers. Bale and Pits, the two compilers who trod in Leland’s steps, added little to his narrative, and the little they added was generally inaccurate. One of these contributions is a fair illustration of the carelessness with which assertions about Chaucer have been originated, and of the reckless way in which they have been repeated even by those from whom we have a right to expect better things. The sixteenth-century editions of the poet included a production of Occleve entitled ‘The Letter of Cupid.’ The last verse of this ends with the statement that it was written in 1402. This was sufficient ground for Bale to declare that Chaucer was living that year. For him there was a certain excuse. The only interest he took in the poet was due to his supposed antagonism

<sup>1</sup> *The Idler*, No. 63, June 30, 1759.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii., p. 128, ed. of 1840.

to the Roman Catholic church, and he was certainly not one to question the authenticity of a work ascribed to him by his own editor. But Occleve's authorship of the poem is definitely stated in the last edition which appeared during the sixteenth century, and this was the standard for the centuries that followed. Yet Fuller in his 'Worthies of England' repeated what had in consequence become then an inexcusable blunder. Even as late as 1737, the great antiquary, William Oldys, revived Bale's mistake, and took occasion to censure those who had been misled as to the date of the poet's death by the inscription on his monument.<sup>1</sup>

Pits added more than Bale, but he did not display any invention, strictly speaking, in the contributions he made to the stock of misinformation already existing about Chaucer. His function seems rather to have been to give to Leland's general misstatements the form of specific untruths; at any rate, to stamp with the authority of circumstantial detail the vague and ill-defined erroneous beliefs which he found current. Thus the assertion made by the first biographer that Chaucer was of noble birth appears in his successor in the form of a precise declaration that the poet's father was a knight and that the poet himself was in the course of time raised to the

<sup>1</sup> Oldys has two notices to this effect in the 'British Librarian,' 1737. One is on page 138; but the reference in the text is to a note on page 356, to a review of 'Weever's Ancient Funeral Monuments,' which appeared in No. VI., for June. It reads as follows: "Dr. Fuller in his *Worthies of England* has rightly observed (tho' he gives us no authority for it) that Chaucer was

living in 1402, for in that year I find he wrote and dated one of his Poems entitled *The Letter of Cupid*. However, Mr. Brigham, by his *Date upon the Monument* he erected in Honour of this Poet at Westminster, Anno 1555, puts a Period to his Life even two Years before that Date of Chaucer's; in which Error many others beside our Author have implicitly followed him."



same rank. Justice to Pits, indeed, requires it to be said that he was not the first to originate this particular error. Statements to that very effect had been made in print long before he had ever set about composing his own work. In 1579 appeared a volume purporting to be written by a student of Cambridge, and rejoicing in the elaborate title of "A Poor Knight his Pallace of private pleasures. Gallantly garnished with goodly Galleries of strang inventions; and prudently polished with sundry pleasant Posies, and other fine fancies of dainty devices and rare delightes." In the course of the work the unknown author speaks<sup>1</sup> in one passage of four English writers; and the first and greatest is introduced in the following lines:

"Then Morpheus sayd, 'loe! where he stands that worthy  
Chauser hight,

The cheefest of all Englishmen, and yet he was a knight.'"

It will be noticed that the poet is mentioned in a manner which indicates that no doubt existed as to his having held the position to which he is here assigned. It must consequently have come even thus early to have been the belief of many. The truth pretty certainly is that ever since Leland had asserted in his usual loose way that Chaucer came of noble stock, there had grown up a disposition on the part of subsequent writers to elevate him to the rank of knight. In expressly stating this as a fact, Pits was therefore doing nothing more than put on permanent record a widely accepted view. But

<sup>1</sup> Collier's *Bibliographical Account of Early English Literature*, vol. iii., p. 224. (American edition.)

while he was not responsible for the invention of the story, he was responsible for embodying it in a work of reference. He thereby gave to it currency and authority. On the strength of this assignment to the knightly class, the poet was for a long period dubbed with the title of Sir. In the patents for poet-laureate this was sometimes at least extended to his contemporary Gower. It has been a frequent assertion, even in our own time, that Chaucer was so styled by Froissart. The only place where that historian mentions the poet at all is in his account of the negotiations of 1377 at Montreuil; and it is only by misreading and misunderstanding what he there says that any such notion could have arisen.<sup>1</sup>

Again Leland tells us that there were reasons which led him to believe that Chaucer was born either in Oxfordshire or in Berkshire. He also spoke of his owning a house in the former county which adjoined the residence of the king. Upon what he relied for thinking as he did about the poet's birthplace he does not deem it necessary to disclose. His statement accordingly is not likely to have much weight with us. After we have once found out how worthless are Leland's reasons when he chooses to communicate them, we need feel no necessity of giving ourselves much concern about the importance of those which he chooses to keep to himself. It was otherwise, however, with Pits. This assertion of his

<sup>1</sup> Froissart, ed. of Kerven de Lettenhove, vol. viii., p. 383; ed. of Buchon, vol. vi., p. 102. In the former edition Froissart's words are as follows: "Si furent envoyet à Monstruel-sus-mer, du costé des François, li sires de Couci, li sires de le Ri-

vière, messires Nicolas Brake, et Nicolas le Mercier, et du costé des Englès, messires Guichars d'Angle, messires Richars Sturi et Jeffrois Cauchiés." A variant of the poet's name in the manuscripts is Gieffroy Cauchier.

predecessor was sufficient to enable him to say positively that Chaucer was born at Woodstock in Oxfordshire. Here, again, it is fair to add that, in making his statement, he may have been aided and possibly authorized by the local tradition of the place. This had already begun some time before to claim the poet as a native. Camden had taken notice of it in his 'Britannia,' though he himself was no believer in it. "The town itself," he says, speaking of Woodstock, "having nothing else to show, boasts of giving birth to Geoffrey Chaucer, our English Homer." The tradition, valueless for what it reports, is valuable for what it suggests. It is one of several proofs that indicate how early the homes and haunts of Thomas Chaucer had come to be identified with those of Geoffrey.

With all the remarkable things which Leland's life managed to convey, it is just as remarkable for the things it did not say. What it omitted may, in fact, be entitled to more consideration than what it contained. Leland has no knowledge of any family tie existing between John of Gaunt and the poet. He displays his general accuracy, indeed, by representing Chaucer as having a sister who was married to the Duke of Suffolk. He rarely comes as near as this to the real fact; for, as it has been pointed out in the preceding chapter, the statement is actually true of the daughter of Thomas Chaucer. Leland, moreover, has nothing to say about the poet's exile and imprisonment which came to play so important a part in the later fictions which did duty as biographies. These omissions are only worthy of notice because they indicate, though they do not prove beyond question, that at the time there was no general

tradition which connected Chaucer with the person or the events that have been mentioned.

In the meantime, some sixteen years before Pits had completed his work, the first life of Chaucer that was written in English had appeared. It was prefixed to the edition of Thomas Speght, which came out in 1598. This is a biography that for several reasons deserves special attention. It was then and long remained much the fullest that had been prepared. It unquestionably represented all that was then known or thought to be known of the poet's life. It was founded to no small extent upon a diligent search of the public records. Nearly all the trustworthy facts which it contributes are indeed due to that source. It mentions specifically Chaucer's titles of *armiger*, *scutifer*, and *valettus*; the grant to him of the custody of the lands and body of Edmund Staplegate for the manor of Bilsington in Kent; his controullership of the port of London; his employment in foreign countries; and the gifts and pensions received by him from Richard II. and Henry IV. Though this biography bears the name of the poet's editor, the gathering together of these details was the work of the antiquary Stow. This he informs us himself. He says expressly in his 'Annals' that he collected the account of Chaucer's life, preferments, children, and death out of the records of the Tower and elsewhere, and gave them to Thomas Speght to be published. But the biography is noteworthy in another respect. To it Glover, the Somerset Herald, contributed a family pedigree of the poet in which for the first time he is represented as marrying a daughter of Sir Payne



Roet, and having Thomas Chaucer as his son. This would lead necessarily to his holding in the end the relation of brother-in-law to John of Gaunt. It has already been pointed out, however, that it is at this very point that the evidence shows signs of strain.<sup>1</sup> No baptismal name is given of the daughter of Sir Payne Roet. This is of itself pretty conclusive evidence that the fact of marriage was not based upon documentary evidence; that then, as now, the assumed relationship of Thomas Chaucer to Geoffrey had begun to perform its double-acting part.

This biography, in consequence of the material it contained gathered from the public records, furnished the first contribution of real facts made to the life of Chaucer. Unfortunately, whenever it left the region of official documents it was full as untrustworthy as the two which had preceded it. There was in truth about the whole of it an all-pervading flavor of Leland that would be sufficient of itself to inspire a feeling of distrust in its accuracy. But it had also another feature which renders it worthy of consideration. It was the first attempt ever made to fill out the details in the life of the poet from the testimony of passages containing allusions, or supposed allusions, to himself in his writings or supposed writings. This method, properly followed, is, so far as it goes, a perfectly legitimate way of gaining information. In some cases it is much the best way. But it is also the one method which is most liable to abuse. A resolute determination to find in any author what one

<sup>1</sup> See pages 99 and 104.

is anxious to find is almost certain to be rewarded with success. Sentences, under torture, like witnesses upon the rack, can be made to confess almost anything that their persecutors desire to have admitted. That sort of penetration which consists in seeing in writings what was never there has been applied to Chaucer with extraordinary zeal, and has yielded information about him full as extraordinary. Nor has this method of investigation stopped with what he himself has directly said. In his case a mysterious process has been evolved called "reading between the lines," and finding in those intervening spaces what could never be found in the lines themselves. The various results of these various devices will all appear in the further development of the Chaucerian legend. The precise evidence upon which many long-current and generally accepted facts in the life of the poet were based will be given in full. It will be found not so much a contribution to biography as to biographical incapacity to test the nature of what constitutes evidence.

Speght, however, deserves credit for expressing himself frequently with a caution which was not always imitated by his successors. He spoke in particular of a possible though improbable journey which Chaucer may have made to Italy in 1368, and in the course of which he may have met Petrarch. But he refrained from making any positive assertion about the matter. In consequence the story has never met with the wide circulation and general acceptance which far more doubtful statements have gained. Though Speght was the first, as far as we know, to mention this possible journey,

his language implies that declarations to this effect about the poet were in print in his time. "Some write," he remarked, "that he with Petrarch was present at the marriage of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, with Violante, daughter of Galeasius, Duke of Milan; yet Paulus Jovius nameth not Chaucer; but Petrarch, he saith, was there." The failure of Paulus Jovius to record his presence has not been sufficient to deter others from insisting upon it. In the meeting of the two men on that occasion there is no intrinsic unreasonableness. In fact, it might almost be said that the discovery of Chaucer's previous connection with the household of Prince Lionel lends an air of probability to the statement. Elizabeth de Burgh, the first wife of the prince, had died in 1363. A second alliance had been arranged for him with the daughter of the Duke of Milan. In the spring of 1368 he passed from Dover to Calais with a retinue of 457 men and 1280 horses on his way to Italy to espouse his new bride.<sup>1</sup> Of this large and splendid train it has been thought not unlikely that Chaucer may have been a member. But there is nothing to show that such was the case. The rolls of the Tower have been carefully examined for this very purpose, but in vain. The name of Chaucer appears nowhere as in attendance upon the person of the prince. In addition there is positive testimony in the records that in 1368 he was concerned in the war in France. This might not have prevented him from being in Italy at the time of the marriage ceremony; but it adds greatly to its improbability.

<sup>1</sup> Rymer's *Fœdera*, vol. iii., part ii., p. 845.

Leland's life, as abridged by Bale and Pits, and the life prefixed to Speght's edition, continued for more than one hundred years to be the only authorities for the little that was known or written about Chaucer. The reputation of the poet in the seventeenth century was at its lowest ebb. Slight interest was taken in his productions. No effort at all was made to disperse the mist which hid from view the career of the man. On the contrary, it was a period in which the most impossible facts were stated about him with the utmost gravity by the most respectable authorities. It was not, indeed, until the appearance of Urry's edition in 1721 that indications are found that research of any kind had been undertaken which was productive of any result. The notices of the poet, accordingly, which occur in works composed during the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the eighteenth are few in number as well as unimportant in character. The fullest of them hardly deserve to be called by so weighty a title as sketches. They varied widely in their statements; but this was due to the special characteristic which they had in common. The standard set by Leland had been worthily maintained. An entire misconception of the facts of Chaucer's life and of the language of his period seems to have been widely regarded as an indispensable qualification for treating either with success. To this was added sedulous care to refrain from the slightest research. In this way no risk was run of tainting the purity of the original ignorance about the poet and his times by the defilement of any actual knowledge. Here, therefore, it will only be necessary to mention the works in which



any account of his life appeared and the order in which they came out.

In accordance with this plan the following works can be enumerated: Thomas Fuller has two brief sketches of Chaucer's career, one in his 'Church History,' published in 1655, the other in his 'Worthies of England,' published posthumously in 1662. Both of them are entertaining and inaccurate. The latter is naturally the more untrustworthy of the two, for before composing it the author had had time to make a fuller study of previous writers and embody any of their mistakes that had been overlooked in the previous account. Further notices of the poet of varying degrees of worthlessness can be found in Edward Phillips's *Theatrum Poetarum*, which came out in 1675; in William Winstanley's 'Lives of the English Poets' which appeared in 1687; in Sir Thomas Pope Blount's 'Characters and Censures of the More Considerable Poets,' which appeared in 1694; and in Jeremy Collier's bulky 'Historical, Geographical, and Poetical Dictionary,' which was published in 1701. Some of these notices consist of but a few lines. There is also an account of him in a compilation called the 'Lives of the English Poets,' by Giles Jacob; but as the volume containing it, though bearing the date of 1720, specifically mentions Urry's edition bearing date the following year, it is not included here. To these may be added the few notes made in the seventeenth century by Aubrey, but not published until 1813. They contain, however, little of any interest and nothing of any value. All of these works are indeed full of the grossest errors in regard to Chaucer; but some of them have a

certain utility on account of the light they occasionally throw upon the state of contemporary opinion.

Let us now consider the account of the poet's life which prevailed during the seventeenth century, before it received the further additions which were made to it in the eighteenth. Certain of its details will be strange to most; but many of them will be familiar to all, and some, perhaps, are still credited by a few. The story was founded substantially upon the biographies of Leland and Speght. These two authors are essentially in harmony; for it never entered the mind of the latter to doubt the trustworthiness of the former. Not once did he differ with him if it could be avoided. It is only in the matter of the birthplace and the birth of the poet that the two writers can be said to conflict at all. It is even more correct to say that it is only in these points that Speght ventures to dissent, though not in a courageous way, from anything that Leland had asserted. It was on the strength of a passage in the 'Testament of Love' that he insisted that it was in London that Chaucer must have been born, and not in Oxfordshire or Berkshire. "Also the city of London," wrote the author of that treatise, "that is to me so dear and sweet, in which I was forth grown, and more kindly love have I to that place than to any other in earth, as every kindly creature hath full appetite to that place of his kindly engendure." It was doubtless this same passage that led Camden to declare the poet a native of that city. Yet though no one in those days thought of denying the authenticity of the work, the statement made in it seems to have had no convincing weight upon the opinion of that or of

succeeding times. The authority of Leland overweighed that of Chaucer himself as quoted by Speght. Woodstock continued upon the whole to be the spot preferred. Cogent æsthetic reasons have indeed been occasionally given for the choice. We have been assured that Woodstock was a more becoming birthplace than the roar and smoke of London for one who loved the forest and sketched so well the wild wood with its song of birds.<sup>1</sup>

Nor was Speght much more fortunate in the general acceptance his views received as to the position in life of the family to which Chaucer belonged. The information furnished by the records led him to doubt its social elevation. He fixed upon a certain vintner, Richard Chaucer, as the poet's possible father. The guess was not a bad one; but it was rather unpopular with later writers. They preferred that the poet should belong to the higher classes, and usually felt it necessary to make their statements in accordance with their wishes. They endeavored "to find out," as a later biographer<sup>2</sup> declared his intention, "a father more worthy of such a son" than a vintner. There were certainly objections to the view taken by Speght. The chief of them naturally was that it was not in accordance with fact. But this, though known to us, was not known to the men who then refused to entertain it. They argued against it mainly upon the ground that a person born in a humble station would not in that age have received so careful an education as the poet evidently did, nor could he have attained to the social and political position he reached. The antiquary Hearne,

<sup>1</sup> *Dublin University Magazine*, 1859, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> Dart's *Life of Chaucer*, prefixed to Urry's edition, 1721.

who denied the nobility, got over this difficulty by representing him as being in all probability the son of a wealthy merchant.<sup>1</sup> Nothing positive, however, was known on the point until a very late period, and so for centuries Chaucer continued to be supplied with a father from either the noble or commercial class, according to the aristocratic or democratic preferences of his biographer.

There was some reason for this difference of opinion. Speght himself was a good deal troubled by the uncertainty which existed in regard to the precise position in life which should be assigned to the poet. Some heralds, according to his statement, inferred that he was not descended from any great family from the character of the arms he bore. Of these he gives a representation and description. Yet he added that, after all, it was simple conjecture. "For," he writes, "honorable houses and of great antiquity have borne as mean arms as Chaucer; and yet his arms are not so mean, either for color, charge, or partition as some would make them." The discussion gave the English church historian an opportunity to make a characteristic sally which has been widely circulated. It was in this way that Fuller described the opposing views about the occupation of the poet's parent. "I have heard," he writes, "his arms quarrelled at, being argent and gules strangely contrived, and hard to be blazoned. Some more wits have made it the dashing of white and red wine (the parents of our modern claret) as nicking his father's profession."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Letter to Bagford in his edition of *Robert of Gloucester*, vol. ii., p. 596.

<sup>2</sup> Fuller's *Church History*, Book iv., cent. xiv.



One refuge there is, fortunately, to which the English genealogist can betake himself when all other resources fail. This is the roll of Battle Abbey. The names in the various versions of that roll, it is pretty well known, differ very widely. It is equally well known that there is no one version in which the names have not been subjected to all the linguistic operations which can modify or alter the form of words. This is a process which originated in the natural desire on the part of a new man to supply himself with an ancient ancestor. Its utility has long been recognized by the biographer, and was fully appreciated as early as the sixteenth century. Several of the versions of the Battle Abbey roll contain the names Cauncy or Chauncy, and one of them certainly has that of Chancer. It needed only the dropping of an *n* in the one case, or the misreading of it for a *n* in the other, to furnish the poet with a satisfactory pedigree. The performance of this easy task gave the biographer a happy escape from the perplexing uncertainty about family dignity by which he had been embarrassed. It was the antiquary Thynne who furnished Speght with this precious item of information; for it was not until his second edition of 1602 that this advance in knowledge was displayed. "But what need I," he then wrote, "to stand upon the antiquity or gentry of Chaucer, when the roll of Battle Abbey affirmeth Chaucer to have come in with the Conqueror?"<sup>1</sup> This was all he said upon this topic, but it proved amply sufficient. Later writers were long enabled by it to state positively that

<sup>1</sup> The same words essentially can be found in Thynne's 'Animadversions,' p. 14.

the poet was a descendant of an ancestor who fought at Hastings.

With the education of Chaucer we come upon a somewhat more limited field of inquiry. As two places have after a fashion contended for the distinction of having given him birth, so there has been a sort of dispute between two others for the credit of furnishing him his learning. He has been represented as a student of Oxford and of Cambridge. Early writers long divided the honors between them by sending him to both ; the latest ones settle the point more summarily by not sending him to either. His education at the former university rests entirely upon the authority of Leland. It was not till the end of the sixteenth century that the rival institution put in its claim. This was first publicly made by Speght. That biographer did not indeed think of denying the fact that Chaucer studied at Oxford: he merely maintained that he was also at Cambridge, "as appeareth," he added, "by his own words in his book entituled 'The Court of Love.'" It may be of interest to observe precisely what these words were, that were regarded as so decisive in the matter. The authenticity of the work containing them will be examined elsewhere ; here for the present it will be conceded. The hero of this poem, who is also its writer, relates his visit to the Court of Love and the experiences that befell him in that resort. There he is asked by the heroine his name. To the question he makes the following reply :

"My name? alas, my heart, why makes thou strange?  
Philogenet I called am far and near,  
Of Cambridge clerk."

It is upon this passage, and this passage alone, that Chaucer was credited with having been a student of the institution mentioned in it. But this method of drawing the widest possible conclusions from the narrowest possible premises did not, as can easily be imagined, stop with this achievement. In the 'Canterbury Tales' the story told by the Reeve is concerned with the adventures of two students of Cambridge. They are described as belonging to a great college there, called the Soler Hall. It was long believed that Clare College was the one entitled to this distinction. At any rate, the supposed identification of it has been held sufficient to justify the occasional assertion that it was at this particular place of study that the poet was probably educated. Of late years a claim of the same nature has been put in for King's Hall, one of the older foundations upon which Trinity College was afterwards established. "There can be little doubt," writes Mr. Riley, "that from its singular multiplicity of sollars, solers, or sun-chambers (fitted with bay-windows, probably), King's Hall was commonly known in Cambridge, at least during the fourteenth century, as 'Sollars Hall,' and that this is the long-sought college which Geoffrey Chaucer mentions in the Reeve's tale as 'Soleres Hall,' and of which he himself is supposed to have been a member."<sup>1</sup>

This same 'Court of Love' has also been the authority for the statement that while at Cambridge Chaucer entered upon his career as author. Near the beginning of it occurs the following stanza, in which the writer explains how he came to make his journey to the Court of Love :

<sup>1</sup> H. T. Riley in *First Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, London, 1870, p. 84.

"When I was young, at eighteen year of age,  
Lusty and light, desirous of pleasánce,  
Approaching on full sad<sup>1</sup> and ripe couráge,  
Love arted<sup>2</sup> me to do my óbservánce  
To his estate, and don him óbeisánce,  
Commanding me the Court of Love to see,  
A lite<sup>3</sup> beside the mount of Citharee."

It will be noticed that the writer says nothing whatever about his having composed the poem at eighteen, but of his having been summoned at that age to make his expedition. Early biographers, however, came to feel that if no information more important than this should be gathered from the verse, the passage had not been made to yield the full results of which it was capable. It was accordingly combined with the supposed information contained in the lines which have previously been quoted from the same poem. From the union of the two were then drawn the inferences that the 'Court of Love' was Chaucer's first work, at least his first work of any length; that he composed it while he was a student at Cambridge; and, finally, that he composed it at eighteen years of age. These specific details were first communicated to the world in the life prefixed to Urry's edition. The truth of the inferences drawn from the two quotations given was demonstrated beyond cavil by another extract from the poem in question, in which the writer says:

"In art of love I write, and songès make  
That may be sung in honor of the King  
And Queen of Love."

<sup>1</sup> Serious.

<sup>2</sup> Incited.

<sup>3</sup> Little.



This seemed to be regarded as settling the matter beyond dispute ; and from that day until within a comparatively recent period these fictions about Chaucer's life and writings, utterly unsupported as they were by anything deserving the name of evidence, have been currently accepted as established facts.

Outside of Leland's assertion there was never the slightest ground for representing Chaucer as a student of Oxford. No record of any sort mentions him as belonging to the institution. His name nowhere appears on the roll of any of its colleges. No tradition ever lingered or even grew up which connected him with the place. Yet his residence as a student was insisted upon in the case of Oxford with far more assurance and pertinacity than in that of her sister university. Cambridge, indeed, never exhibited for the possession of the poet the determined positiveness of assertion to which contestants usually resort who strive to make up for weakness of evidence by violence of language. He was sometimes assigned to her by others ; she herself apparently never challenged him through her authorized representatives as her own. It may have been due to a feeling of the essential weakness of her claim. It may have been due to the feeling that her poetical superiority would not be materially affected by the loss or gain of a single man, no matter how eminent. Upon her roll of students stand the names of Spenser, Milton, Dryden, Gray, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, and Tennyson. The number and greatness of these cause her fertility, whether accidental or incidental, to contrast sharply with the comparative literary barrenness of her rival. The

difference between the two universities in this matter may have been, and probably has been, purely fortuitous ; but it unquestionably proves one thing, that something more goes to the creation of poets than a professorship of poetry. It was the consciousness of her inferiority in the reputation of her men of letters that in some cases certainly led the adherents of Oxford to put in an unqualified claim for the greatest of early English authors. The claim, whether doubted or not, was not openly denied by the adherents of Cambridge. They were assuredly furnished with frequent opportunities ; for it was asserted and maintained as if there could not be the slightest question about the fact. One instance is enough to cite, out of many that could be. When the result at Culloden had crushed the Stuart cause beyond recovery, the Jacobite faction in England became excessively demonstrative in paying to it that tribute of noisy zeal which men, half in earnest, are apt to yield to causes so hopelessly lost that there is no danger of being called upon to risk property or life in their actual maintenance. Oxford was a great centre of this feeling, and the disloyal demonstrations that took place at that seat of education brought upon the university more than once the attention of the government. It was in consequence of the devotion ostentatiously displayed there for the exiled family that Mason made upon it his poetical attack entitled 'Isis, an Elegy.' This was published in 1749. In the following year Thomas Warton replied to it in a glowing panegyric upon the university, entitled 'The Triumph of Isis.' In the course of this poem he represented Chaucer as leading the train of Oxford poets in these lines:

“Ev’n now, confess’d to my adoring eyes,  
In awful ranks thy gifted sons arise.  
Tuning to knightly tale his British reeds,  
Thy genuine bards immortal Chaucer leads:  
His hoary head o’erlooks the gazing quire,  
And beams on all around celestial fire.”

This was no mere rhetorical artifice on the part of Warton. He had thoroughly educated himself into the belief of what he said. In his ‘History of English Poetry’ he started out in his account of Chaucer with the assertion, quite as a matter of course, that the poet was educated at Oxford. He repeated this statement more than once as if it were an undeniable and undenied fact.<sup>1</sup> The sole basis for the claim of this university rests, as has been previously mentioned, upon the biography of Leland, who, so far as his account of Chaucer is concerned, aptly deserves to be styled the father of lies. Speght, who accepted his authority, felt bound to assign the poet to a particular college. He fixed upon Canterbury or Merton as being the one, though he did not pronounce a definite opinion in favor of either. The life prefixed to Urry’s edition assumed upon this point a more judicial attitude. It, however, did not pretend to be positive as to the particular college at which Chaucer was educated, though it informs us that it is certain he removed from Cambridge to complete his studies at Oxford. Yet the conclusion was drawn that Canterbury could not have been the place, because it was not founded till 1363, at which time the poet, according to this biogra-

<sup>1</sup> E. g., “John Gatesden was a Chaucer was educated.”—*Warton’s* fellow of Merton College, where *History*, sec. xvii.

phy, was thirty-five years old. Merton was therefore settled upon as the college to which Chaucer belonged. His name, to be sure, did not appear anywhere on its records; but then the names of some of his friends, such as Strode and Occleve, did occur. This appeared to be nearly as satisfactory as regards the fact of his having been a student of the university as if his own name had been enrolled; as regards the assertion of the fact, it was just as satisfactory. From this time on the poet was frequently, perhaps usually, spoken of as a graduate of Merton College. Warton's unqualified statements have been given; and his authority has naturally caused them to be constantly repeated. Tyrwhitt was the first to cast a doubt upon this view. While himself a student of Oxford, his earliest production had been a poetical protest against the hostility prevailing there against the house of Hanover.<sup>1</sup> Nor was he at a later period inclined to be any more loyal to his university in the matter of Chaucer's residence. He pointedly expressed in his edition of the 'Canterbury Tales' his disbelief in what had then come to be the current opinion. He showed that the single circumstance by which Leland supported his assertion that the poet was educated at Oxford was the supposition that he was born in the neighborhood, and this was known to be false. Still, Tyrwhitt's strongly uttered doubt had little, if any, effect in checking the circulation of the statement. Even to this day many books of reference make Chaucer a graduate of Oxford, and, if they go further into detail, represent him as belonging to Merton College.

<sup>1</sup> *An Epistle to Florio at Oxford.* London, 1749.



After having him complete his education at Oxford, Leland, it will be remembered, sent Chaucer to pursue his studies in France. This, he tells us, took place during the latter part of the reign of Richard II. As that monarch was deposed in 1399, and the poet died the following year, the information is worth mentioning, not for the light it throws upon the subject, but for the light it throws upon the character of him who furnishes the information. It is perfectly conclusive proof that Leland, in addition to his general ignorance about the man whose life he supposed he was writing, was specifically ignorant of the very century in which he flourished. Blunders of this sort might be treated as no more than venial slips in a mere admirer; they seem rather objectionable in a biographer whom we are also asked to honor as an antiquary. Still, it never occurred to Speght, who really knew when Chaucer died, to venture to impugn the accuracy of his predecessor. He therefore invented a way of saving Leland's credit by ruining his own. Accordingly, he not only sent the poet in his youth to study in France, but furnished additional proof of his continued thirst for knowledge by making him revisit that country with the same object in view in extreme old age. This method of reconciling Leland's assertions with possibility was followed by some later writers; by others, however, it was either rejected or neglected. Phillips, in his *Theatrum Poetarum*, carried Leland's statement to its logical conclusion. He gravely informs us that Chaucer flourished during the reigns of Henry IV., Henry V., and part of Henry VI. Bad as this assertion was, it was found capable of being made worse by his immediate

successors. Jeremy Collier, in his Dictionary, improved upon the ridiculousness of the original statement by putting the poet's death in the year 1440; and this absurd date can occasionally be found repeated as late as the latter half of the eighteenth century.

Speght also copied and credited Leland's assertion that Chaucer, upon his return from France, took up the study of law. To this he added the remark that he belonged, apparently, to the Middle Temple; "for," he wrote, "not many years since Master Buckley did see a record in the same house where Geoffrey Chaucer was fined two shillings for beating a Franciscan friar in Fleet Street." This, like the meeting with Petrarch, is a story which, whether true or not, we all feel ought to be true. From the little we know of the poet, it is a natural inference that it is an account of an event that might well have happened. But, unfortunately, no one, so far, save Master Buckley, has seen this record; and there seems to be no one now who can give us any information about Master Buckley himself.<sup>1</sup> Still, belief in a tale of this kind will always flourish, independent of evidence. The story, therefore, with various modifications, continues to appear every now and then, and is likely to appear until the end of time. The invincible tendency towards fal-

<sup>1</sup> This may have been the Master Buckley whom Richard Mulcaster mentions in his 'Book of Education,' printed in 1581. "Being himself Provost of King's College, in Cambridge," he says, writing of Sir John Cheke, "in the time of his most honored prince and his best-hoped pupil, the good King Edward, brother to our sovereign Queen Elizabeth, he sent down from the court one Mas-

ter Buckley, sometime fellow of the said college, and very well studied in the mathematical, to read arithmetic and geometry to the youth of the college; and for the better encouraging them to that study, gave them a number of Euclides at his own cost. Master Buckley had drawn the rules of arithmetic into verses, and gave the copies abroad to his hearers."

sification and forgery, which seems to have been in full possession of Chatterton's nature, is strikingly illustrated in the way he dealt with it. He had found it in a copy of Speght's edition to which he had access. Under the title of an 'Anecdote of Chaucer,' he retold it in the 'Town and Country Magazine,' but enriched it with such a wealth of circumstantial falsehoods that its original author would have experienced some difficulty in recognizing it. His version appeared in the number of that periodical for January, 1770. As it is short, it is worth quoting in full as a veritable curiosity of literature, both for the impudence of the invention and the ignorance of the inventor. "After Chaucer"—so runs this amplification of Speght's account—"had distributed copies of the 'Tale of Piers Plowman,' a Franciscan friar wrote a satiric maumery upon him; which was acted at the monasteries in London, and at Woodstock before the court. Chaucer, not a little nettled at the poignancy and popularity of the satire, meeting his antagonist in Fleet Street, beat him with his dagger; for which he was fined two shillings, as appears by a record of the Inner Temple, where Chaucer was a student."<sup>1</sup>

One other fiction about Chaucer seems to have sprung up in the seventeenth century, and to have lasted with a good deal of vitality down to a late period. This is the

<sup>1</sup> The confusing of the spurious Plowman's tale with Langland's 'Vision of Piers Plowman' is a blunder into which many besides Chatterton have fallen; but to him must, doubtless, be ascribed the sole credit for the word "maumery." The manuscript of the anecdote giv-

en above is contained in the collection of the Chatterton forgeries, which was received by the British Museum after the death, in 1800, of Dr. Robert Glynn, of King's College, Cambridge, and in accordance with his bequest.

assertion that he held the position of poet laureate. The statement to this effect was first made, so far as I can discover, in the *Theatrum Poetarum* of Edward Phillips. Still, it was doubtless a matter of common belief, and perhaps of record, long before his work came out. The fact certainly is assumed and specifically mentioned in the patent conferring the post of poet laureate upon Dryden, in 1670, which granted to that author "all and singular the rights, privileges, benefits, and advantages thereunto belonging," as fully as they had been enjoyed by "Sir Geoffrey Chaucer, Knight, Sir John Gower, Knight," and others not necessary to be mentioned here. It is therefore possible that similar references may appear in the patents previously issued. The belief of the poet's having held the post took its rise, probably, from the grant made to him, in 1374, of a daily pitcher of wine. This method of rewarding services, however, was common in the fourteenth century. It was far from being limited to Chaucer, nor is there any reason to believe that, in his case, the donation was conferred for his skill as a writer. Ben Jonson was the first upon whom this fluid form of appreciation of literary merit was bestowed; nor is it at all unlikely that it was the conviviality to which he personally was addicted that originally suggested the character of the gift. But it came speedily to be looked upon by the public as the distinguishing perquisite of the office. It is, therefore, not unnatural that a gift of a similar nature made to Chaucer should have been taken as evidence that he had held in the court of Edward III. a post equivalent to that which Jonson filled in the court of James I. and



of Charles I. We now know well that there was no such personage as a poet laureate, in the modern sense of the word, until the accession of the house of Stuart. Still, that knowledge has not prevented the seventeenth-century belief from lasting down even to our day. No fictitious story connected with Chaucer's career has ever been wholly abandoned. It may be modified, but it is never contemptuously cast aside. As he can no longer be deemed a poet attached regularly to the royal household, an office has been created for him with the designation of volunteer laureate. A late author has been found to tell us that Chaucer actually took this title, whatever may be meant by it, continued to use it during the whole of his life, and that after his death it was assumed by Gower.<sup>1</sup> Knowledge is the mother of confidence; but so likewise is ignorance.

The most widespread and enduring, however, of all the legendary stories connected with Chaucer, is the one which makes him a resident of Woodstock. Near the royal park was a tenement which, as late certainly as 1436, was called Hanwell House.<sup>2</sup> In the sixteenth century it had acquired the title of Chaucer's House, and under that name was disposed of several times during the reigns of Elizabeth and of James I. This remained true of a later period. In the early part of the eighteenth century a printed copy of the poet's works was kept chained in the parlor of this mansion. It bore an obscure Latin inscription, which seemed to say among

<sup>1</sup> *The Poets Laureate of England*, by Walter Hamilton. London, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> *Woodstock Manor and its Environs*. By the Rev. Edward Marshall, p. 117.

other things that Charles Perrot, a man, clearly, of the most pronounced royalist sympathies, had, in 1678, restored to the dwelling from which it had been violently ejected with its owner this volume of the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, easily the prince of poets of his time, and himself the poet, the friend, and the neighbor of princes. Even now, while the building has been altered, so that little if anything of the original structure is left, the title continues to survive. As late as 1871 the residence, on changing hands, was advertised under the name of Chaucer's House.<sup>1</sup>

There is nothing at all improbable in the view that the poet may have often seen Woodstock. He was attached to the court, and as a member of it might naturally accompany it whenever a visit was paid to this royal manor. Woodstock was a favorite residence of Edward III. There it was that the Black Prince was born, as well as some other of the king's children. His successor also made it a place of not infrequent resort. But there is nothing that has ever been discovered in any records to justify the assertion that the poet had a habitation there. Nor is there a line in his own writings which can be interpreted to imply any such condition of things. Much stress has been laid upon a passage in his 'Parliament of Fowls,' where he is supposed to speak of the place. But if the park there described as walled with green stone, and the stream which ran through it, and the weir contained in it, could be proved to refer to Woodstock with its stream and weir, the mention of

<sup>1</sup> A correspondent of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for June, 1792, says that it was then used as a malt-house.

them could not be regarded as establishing anything more than that Chaucer was depicting a spot familiar to himself. It could not rationally be inferred, though as a matter of fact it has been inferred, that he was dwelling in the immediate neighborhood.

That, however, early became a current belief. For centuries the story was generally accepted, and widely repeated on the authority originally of Speght, that "the place of his most abode was a fair house of stone next to the king's place," and that he "took great pleasure to lie there, in regard of the park, in sundry of his writings, much by him commended, as also to be near the court where his best friends were, and they who were able to do him most pleasure." There are certain absurdities in this account which it is not essential to point out here. They are of the kind sure to be found in the statements of men who never succeed in gaining a full mastery of the difference that exists between the discovery of facts and their invention. The passage as a whole seems to be mainly a series of inferences, first, from Leland's assertion that the poet had a house at Woodstock adjacent to the king's; secondly, from the supposed allusions to the park in the 'Parliament of Fowls,' in the 'Death of Blanche,' and in the so-called 'Dream,' now better styled the 'Isle of Ladies;' and, finally, from a direct reference to the place in the poem entitled the 'Cuckoo and the Nightingale.' In this production there is an agreement made to hold a convention of birds,

"Under the maple that is fair and green,  
Before the chamber window of the queen,  
At Woodstock upon the greene lay."

This work was long accepted as the poet's. But even if that be admitted, the utmost that can be inferred from it is that the writer may have composed it at Woodstock; there is nothing in it to indicate that his home was in that place.

In fact, there can be little doubt that this whole tradition originated from the grant of Woodstock manor made to Thomas Chaucer in 1411. That is the first historical mention of any one with the family name in connection with the spot. Nor, as we have seen, was the title applied to the house till much more than a century after the poet was dead. For precisely the same reason as the foregoing, earlier writers were led to state that a grant was made by the king to Chaucer of the manor of Ewelme, or New Elme, as it was formerly called. The historians of Oxfordshire also describe a spot at the confluence of the Thame and the Isis which, according to local tradition, Chaucer was wont to frequent, and where he composed many of his works. Claims of this sort are by no means confined to that county. A tradition of precisely the same kind as that about Woodstock sprang up under the same circumstances, and apparently at the same time, about Donnington Castle, near Newbury, in Berkshire. This property came into the possession of Thomas Chaucer in right of his wife, the daughter and heiress of Sir John Burghersh. The conveyance took effect long after the poet himself was dead. There is nothing whatever that has been handed down from his own time which would cause us to believe that he ever even saw the spot. We are certain, from the records of ownership that have been preserved, that there



was no time in which it could have been in his hands. Yet an oak on the grounds was long known under his name and pointed out as the tree under which he was in the habit of sitting. This is first mentioned by Speght. Aubrey tells us that it was cut down in the reign of Charles I., and that the one responsible for the act was called up before the Star Chamber, severely harangued against, and punished by a fine.<sup>1</sup> The tradition, however, did not die with the tree. Evelyn in his '*Sylva*,' published in 1664, referred to it and repeated it with some variations. According to his account there were three oaks in the park, and these were reported to have been personally planted by the poet. One was dedicated to the king, another to the queen, and the third was called after his own name. These trees, it may be added, grew up with great discretion and loyalty; for when they were felled the king's was the largest and the queen's next in size.<sup>2</sup> Other writers of that time and later inform us in addition that under the oak named after himself Chaucer composed many of his most celebrated pieces. Nor in the middle of the last century had this story died out. The stump left standing still continued bravely to maintain the reputation of the fallen tree, and for that matter may yet be locally enjoying its ancient glory.<sup>3</sup> There seems, however, to have been an occasional

<sup>1</sup> Aubrey's *Lives, etc.*, in *Letters Written by Eminent Persons, etc.*, vol. ii., part i., p. 284.

<sup>2</sup> *Sylva*, book iii., chap. iii., p. 227, edition of 1706.

<sup>3</sup> "This river (i. e., Lambesbourn) also washes the remains of Donnington Castle; where Sir Geoffery Chaucer, the parent of English poetry,

once resided, of which also Sylvester remarks:

'—Water which in haste doth run  
 To wash the feet of Chaucer's Donnington.'

The country people to this day shew you a place or stump of an oak, which they call Chaucer's oak; and think that it was the very spot of

effort on the part of tradition to transfer this tree to Oxford. A poem written in 1755, in honor of the university, and entitled 'The Praise of Isis,' celebrates an aged oak in the grove to which Addison was wont to resort. This the writer assures us, in the following lines, was also the haunt of the greater earlier author :

" There Fame records  
Custom'd the merry Chaucer erst to frame  
His laughter-moving tale : nor, when his harp  
He tuned to notes of louder pitch, and sung  
Of ladies passing fair, and bloody jousts,  
And warrior steeds, and valour-breathing knights  
For matchless prowess fam'd, deserv'd he not  
The laureat wreath ; for he, like Phœbus, knew  
To build in numbers apt the lofty song."<sup>1</sup>

How firmly the belief that connected Chaucer with Oxford had become established is made evident by the fact that the writer of this poem was a Cambridge man.

These were the fictions about Chaucer which originated in the sixteenth century and found general acceptance and currency in all cases down to the end of the seventeenth, and in many cases to a much later period. But the legendary life did not stop at this point. A new and fuller and falser story, if that last epithet can be properly used, was now about to be developed. The account of it will require, to some extent, the anticipation of matter that rightly belongs to a later chapter ; for it involves the examination of a work upon

ground where Chaucer retired and composed many of his poems."—  
*Universal Magazine* for June, 1747,  
vol. i., p. 15.

<sup>1</sup> *The Praise of Isis*, a poem, by a gentleman of Cambridge. London, 1755.

which was built that history of the poet's life that still survives with all the vitality that belongs to a narrative which adds slander to falsehood. This work is the prose 'Testament of Love.' Of all the writings produced by Chaucer or ascribed to him, this is the most wearisome to read and the hardest to understand. Yet in his biography it has played a part more important than all his other writings put together. For the complete comprehension of the story, a full account must be given of this ultimate source from which it was derived. It is all the more necessary because the 'Testament of Love' is a work which very few men ever meet with, and fewer still ever read. It was included in the volume devoted to Chaucer in Chalmers's bulky collection of English poets. But, with this exception, it has never been printed save in the clumsy folios which contain the complete works of the poet. These are not often found, except on the shelves of great libraries or of curious scholars. Not one of them is, in fact, of a later date than the earlier part of the eighteenth century; and the only one that can be looked upon as an authority for the text of this particular treatise is the first edition of 1532. All others are mere reprints, so far as this production is concerned. Still, there is very little variation, and none of importance; and the following may be taken as a summary of the work sufficient for the purpose here contemplated.

The 'Testament of Love' is a treatise in three books, and is directly modelled upon the 'Consolation of Philosophy' of Boethius. The latter is a work which seems to have made a profound impression upon the minds of

men in the Middle Ages—an impression which, at this day, it is somewhat hard for us to realize. Whether it was that the fate of the Roman senator constantly haunted the hearts of the actors in the stormy scenes of those periods, or that the present could never be so prosperous but there existed a secret feeling that the future had in reversion great store of sorrow, certain it is that the reflections with which the latest of the philosophers consoled his prison hours had a special interest for men who knew not how soon they might be called upon to repeat his experience. It was one of the books which Alfred the Great translated into the English of his time. It was a special favorite of Chaucer himself. He not only made a version of it, but he sometimes introduced quotations from it which could have been left out with advantage. Yet in the feeling he entertained about the work he reflected the general taste of the cultivated classes of his day; and the treatise under consideration is but one of many examples of the wide-reaching influence, both as regards form and matter, which the original exerted. Like its model, the 'Testament of Love' is in the shape of a dialogue. As Philosophy appears to Boethius in his prison in the character of a venerable but beautiful woman, so in this imitation a being appears to the writer who seems at first to represent an earthly love, but as the work proceeds assumes more and more the nature of an incarnation of the Divine Love. Like its model, also, the work is to a certain extent autobiographical; at least it is full of references to events real or fictitious in the life of the author.

If we accept these references as relating to occurrences



which actually took place, the following facts can be made out: At the supposed time of composition, the writer is in prison; at any rate, he has been released from it only a short time before. He had been in the possession of wealth and honor, but had succeeded in losing both. He had held positions of great public trust of which he had been deprived. In particular, he had, to use his own language, "administered the office of common doing, as in ruling the establishments among the people," whatever may be meant by these words. And he had fallen from this position because he had been led to take part in certain political intrigues and conspiracies which seem to have had for their immediate aim the possession of the government of the city of London. Seem to have had, it is well to observe, for the language of the 'Testament of Love' is throughout oracular in its obscurity, and any given passage can often bear an unlimited number of interpretations. But in consequence of his participation in these "conjurations and other great matters of ruling of citizens," he had been forced to flee and to live for some time in exile. Where this place was is not once stated, though he mentions incidentally that he had paid the expenses of some of his associates till they were turned out of Zealand. But the men for whom he suffered proved unfaithful to him, and even endeavored to defraud him. So, at last, he appears to have returned to his native country, determined to take the chance of the fate which fortune had in store for him. Arriving there, he had been arrested and thrown into prison. While in that situation he had been offered both pardon and security if he would

make full confession of whatever he knew in regard to the matters in which he had been concerned. To solicitations of this kind he had finally yielded. By this compliance he had secured for himself the safety and liberty which had been promised. He had, however, secured them at the expense of his reputation. He was charged with having betrayed his associates, and from the odium of the accusation and the hatred caused by the general belief in it he had been unable to free himself.

These are the main facts, if they can be called facts, which can be made out from the 'Testament of Love.' Even in the simple form in which they are here stated, it is probable that too much certainty has been imputed to what, after all, is but mere inference. For illustration, the writer speaks of himself as having been in exile; but neither is the time when, nor the place where, mentioned, nor does he say that he returned from it of his own accord, or that, having returned from it, he was thrown in prison. It is, indeed, possible that "to be exiled" may be used in this work as in the first book of the 'Consolation of Philosophy,' not in the sense of being driven from one's country, but of having gone astray from the true path of thought and action. However that may be, all of the details above given, whether actually asserted or merely inferred, were assumed as true. These scattered statements were brought together so as to form the narrative which has just been told. Then the events mentioned in them, or indirectly alluded to, were connected with certain political occurrences that took place in the reign of Richard II. After the personal statements of the 'Testament of Love,' and

the political occurrences of that time had been ingeniously welded together, they were applied to the biography of Chaucer and carefully dovetailed, wherever it could be done, with well-known facts in his life. There is a possibility that the information drawn from these three sources may have been in all cases absolutely true, when in each case it stood by itself. From the combination of them was formed, in process of time, a clear and consistent story which, so far as it applied to Chaucer, was absolutely false.

The work of establishing this legend was reserved for the eighteenth century. There was a faint suggestion of it in the biography of Speght, but it was nothing more than a suggestion. He simply remarked that it was evident from the 'Testament of Love,' that Chaucer was in some trouble during the reign of Richard II., and that in that treatise he greatly complained of his own rashness in following the multitude, and of their hatred against him for having revealed their purposes. He also added that he had seen a manuscript of the poet's 'Complaint to his Purse,' containing ten times more than the printed copy, in which he had made great lamentation for his wrongful imprisonment. The biographer, however, did not venture to go at all into detail. After making some statements of fact irreconcilable with his theories, he dismissed the subject with a compliment to the prudence of Chaucer in those troublous times; for he tells us that "as he was learned, so was he wise, and kept himself much out of the way in Holland, Zealand, and France, where he wrote most of his books."

Speght's statement seems not to have made the slight-

est impression upon the men of his time. There is not, so far as I can discover, in any account of Chaucer in the seventeenth century, or in any reference then made to him, the briefest allusion to these troubles, which had, indeed, been hinted at by his biographer rather than asserted. This continued to be the case even later. There appeared, for instance, in 1720, a work entitled the 'Lives of the English Poets,' by Giles Jacob. The account contained in it of Chaucer's career would be amusing, had there not been so many before and since precisely resembling it. It naturally comprised in a condensed form all existing blunders, and, indeed, added one or two impossibilities of its own creation. Thus, it represents the poet as dying in 1400, but also as being laureate to Henry IV. and Henry V. But even in this sketch there was no suggestion of Chaucer's exile and imprisonment. That story was to be fully developed in the new biography that was prefixed to Urry's edition of 1721. This was far the most elaborate life of the poet which up to that time had appeared, and was the first since Speght's in which there had been any attempt made to gather fresh material. It was, according to Tyrwhitt, the work of William Thomas, who digested it, however, out of collections made by the antiquary John Dart. This, at least, is Thomas's own assertion. In an interleaved copy of Urry's 'Chaucer' which he presented to the British Museum, he inserted a note to the effect that the biography contained in that edition was very incorrectly drawn up by Mr. Dart, and corrected and enlarged by himself.<sup>1</sup> It sometimes goes in conse-

<sup>1</sup> Tyrwhitt, *Chaucer*, Appendix to Preface, note *n*.



quence by the name of the one, and sometimes by that of the other. Dart gives an altogether different view of the matter. He was, indeed, far from being pleased with the use which had been made of the materials which he had furnished. In a work published shortly after, he complained with a good deal of warmth of the treatment he had received. His arguments on disputed points had been omitted, and alterations little to his liking had been made in various places. As a result, errors had crept in, of which he was not guilty, but for which he was held responsible. One other ground of dissatisfaction was indicated, though not explicitly asserted. No acknowledgment of any kind had been made him for the labor he had bestowed in contributing to the success of the work, though he had been at a very extraordinary expense to collect the information. He had never even seen the edition save on a bookseller's counter, "not being willing," he added, "to buy it, when my old one, with my own written notes, served me as well." At the end he poured forth his feelings on the subject in verse, and expressed his opinion of the way in which his collections had been manipulated and his own toil rewarded, in some pointed lines, of which these are worth quoting:

"Industrious thus, to do my Master right,  
And save his Actions Time—conceal'd from Night;  
Long on the dusty Roll and mould'ring File,  
I urg'd the intricate laborious Toil;  
Toil ill return'd by this ungenerous Age,  
Unthank'd the Labor and defac'd the Page."

There had been, in truth, a good deal of honest work

done in the preparation of this biography. Dart in particular deserves the credit of having been the first to suggest that the father of the poet was John Chaucer, which recent investigations have shown to be the fact. He repeated this same statement in his volumes devoted to an account of Westminster Abbey.<sup>1</sup> He was also the first to call public attention to the deposition made in the controversy between Sir Richard le Scrope and Sir Robert Grosvenor. He also denied certain prevalent errors. He expressed disbelief in Chaucer's having ever held the position of poet laureate, and moreover in the existence of any such office in the fourteenth century. He likewise rejected Chaucer's authorship of the two pieces entitled 'The Plowman's Tale' and 'Jack Upland.' Both of these had long been included among his productions, and had always excited special attention, not so much by the excellence of their matter as by the virulence of their invective. Still, any contributions he may have made to our knowledge of the poet's life, or any benefit he may have done his reputation by relieving him of any responsibility for the works mentioned, were more than counterbalanced by the injury he did his character by the story he now set afloat. This was created entirely out of a diligent study of the 'Testament of Love.' The few hints contained in Speght's account about Chaucer's troubles now assumed magnificent proportions. Nothing new had been discovered on the matter under consideration; but an infinitude of

<sup>1</sup> "His father, as I take it, was one Sir John Chaucer, employed in foreign affairs by Edward III."—Dart's *History of St. Peter's, Westminster*, p. 83. This is the work referred to on the preceding page.

exact detail had been secured by the thorough and systematic utilization of various remarks scattered up and down the pages of the 'Testament of Love.' Moreover, time had wrought its usual effect. Doubt had become certainty, surmise had been turned into explicit assertion.

The following is an abstract of the story as told in Dart's life and repeated with more or less fulness of detail by every biographer up to the middle of the present century and by many of them since. Chaucer was attached to the party of John of Gaunt, the "timè-honored Lancaster" of Shakspeare, the uncle of the boy-king, Richard II. At a period when the influence of that nobleman was on the wane, and while he himself was absent from England, the country was disturbed by civil commotions excited by his followers. The culmination of the troubles came in 1384, when John of Northampton, a creature of the Duke of Lancaster, took advantage of the favor in which he stood with the multitude to seek re-election as lord mayor of London. This brought him into collision with the court. In the conflict which ensued the poet, who was at that time controller of the customs, took sides with the popular party. The latter was defeated. The success of the court was followed by the downfall and ruin of all opposed to it, who had been concerned in the disturbances which had taken place. Chaucer was forced to go into exile. He made his escape to Hainault, afterwards went to France, and finally took refuge in Zealand. There he struggled for a while with all sorts of privations. Finding at last his means of support cut off by the treachery of pretended friends, he

carried into effect the apparently desperate resolution of returning to his native country. Soon after his arrival in England he was arrested and imprisoned, probably in the Tower. There he was informed that his only way to obtain mercy was to make a full confession of the treasonable practices in which he had been engaged, and thereby expose his confederates. After evading this for a long time, he at last consented. By so doing he gained the favor of the monarch. But he also brought upon himself the ill-will of his previous associates and of the people. As a sort of apology for his conduct and of consolation for the miserable straits into which he had fallen, he wrote the treatise which goes under the name of the 'Testament of Love.'

This henceforth became the accepted story. For more than a century it met with neither contradiction nor criticism. Even Tyrwhitt, cautious, not to say sceptical, in everything purporting to Chaucer's career, did not venture to question the substantial accuracy of the narrative, though some of the manuscript additions which were printed after his death show that he had struck upon dates which made some of these details inconsistent with the alleged facts. It naturally met, therefore, with the fullest assent in the sketches of Chaucer which appeared in the eighteenth century, such as those contained in Cibber's 'Lives of the Poets,' and in the 'Biographia Britannica.' Elaborate as the story was, it was destined to be still further elaborated in the next biography of importance. This was not, as might have been supposed, the work of the great scholar who has just been mentioned. Tyrwhitt had, indeed, contem-



plated writing a life of Chaucer. He had, however, been deterred from going on with the attempt by the little success that had rewarded the time and pains spent in searching for materials. He could find nothing new that was certain; and "he was not disposed," he tells us, "either to repeat the comments and inventions by which former biographers had endeavored to supply the deficiency of facts, or to substitute any of his own for the same laudable purpose." He therefore contented himself with adding to the preface of his edition of the 'Canterbury Tales' a short abstract of the historical passages in the life of the poet. In this he strove to separate the events which were well ascertained from those which had nothing to recommend them beyond the single circumstance of having been often repeated. Further than that he did not seek to go; and for not going further was taken contemptuously to task by the poet's next biographer. This was William Godwin, famous with one class in his own time as the author of the treatise on 'Political Justice,' with another class as the author of 'Caleb Williams,' and perhaps still better known now for being the husband of Mary Wollstonecraft and the father-in-law of Shelley.

Godwin's 'Life of Chaucer,' which appeared in 1803, in two large quarto volumes, is in many ways an extraordinary specimen of biography. The perusal of the work, when for any reason that becomes an absolute necessity, is as much of the nature of a solemn literary undertaking as was its composition. It is perhaps the earliest, though unhappily not the latest or even the largest, illustration of that species of biography in which the

lack of information about the man who is its alleged subject is counterbalanced by long disquisitions about anything or everything he shared in or saw, or may have shared in or seen. In truth, no more representative specimen exists in our literature of that numerous and highly respectable class of works which add dignity and completeness to a library, but are not written to be read. Certainly nobody does read them, nobody thinks of reading them. Men with good intentions are always expecting to read them, but never find for it just the right time. In this instance the reasons for neglect are almost too obvious. Godwin, while nominally writing a life of Chaucer, looked upon biography as nothing more than an entrance into the broader fields of social and political history, where it was permitted him to disport himself at will. He made everything, consequently, a pretext for lugging in knowledge of all kinds and from all quarters, with no other reason apparently than to show that he possessed it or thought he possessed it. One illustration of his method will give a perfect conception of the character of the whole work. The story that Chaucer was a student of law at London is, as has been observed, unsupported by anything that can be called evidence. It has been repeated so often, however, and has been affirmed so persistently, that no biographer could afford to neglect noticing it. Godwin mentioned the uncertainty attending the subject. But not on that account had he any intention of letting it go. He set out to turn it to his own special use in the following manner. "Let us, however, for a moment," he writes, "conceive of Chaucer as a student of law, and let us examine

what ideas and conceptions would have been produced in his mind by 'this study.' On this most insecure of pegs he thereupon proceeded to hang several pages of disquisition, in which he gave an account of the civil law, of the canon law, of the feudal law, of the English constitution, of early writers on English law, of modes of pleading, of the venality of the administration of justice, and of the attempts for its reformation. This is neither an extreme case nor an uncommon one; it is, in fact, the one regularly employed throughout. The application of this process through two volumes accordingly often causes Chaucer himself to appear to the reader an exceedingly dim and dubious speck on the horizon of the production that was supposed to be devoted to the account of his life.

There was a certain justification for the title of the work that the poet's name was occasionally introduced in it, and remarks were made occasionally upon his writings. But this, which should properly be a recommendation, is in reality its main defect. Where what is said is certain to be misleading, if not false, it is meritorious to leave as much unsaid as possible. Godwin's 'Life of Chaucer' was no more characterized by its excessive irrelevancy than it was by the excessive credulity displayed in it by its author, and his utter inability to distinguish between legitimate and illegitimate inferences. Even when his facts were accurate, the conclusions that he allowed himself to found upon them bore about the same relation to the truth that the incidents of a dream do to the actual event that may have inspired them. His self-confidence, however, is entitled to a certain re-

spect ; for never was more consistent incapacity exhibited by any man to be shaken by a doubt of his omniscience. Godwin was always ready to tell what he did not know, to describe what he had not seen, and to explain what he did not understand. Satisfactory reasons were given by him for everybody's conduct, and precise dates were assigned to everybody's actions. Chaucer, of course, came in for his full share of this treatment. We are often told precisely how he felt on any particular occasion, and sometimes what he said and what was said to him.

Godwin's life of the poet may indeed be declared to deserve the distinction of being the most worthless piece of biography in the English language—certainly the most worthless produced by a man of real ability. He did not spare labor in its preparation ; but his labor was mainly devoted to points which had only the remotest relation to his subject. He seemed, moreover, constitutionally incapable of sifting truth from error, and was especially inclined to the biographer's besetting sin, the stating as true what he was anxious should be true. The work naturally did not meet with much favor, though assuredly with full as much as it deserved. Scott offered to review it for the 'Edinburgh,' then fairly started on its career of success. "As he understands the subject," wrote Jeffrey to Horner, under date of October 19, 1803, "and hates the author, I have a notion he will make a good article of it."<sup>1</sup> However desirable these qualifications may be in the production of a satisfactory criticism, the editor of the review judged wrong-

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Francis Horner*, vol. ii., p. 74.



ly in one respect. Scott's acquaintance with literary history was very extensive and covered a vast variety of subjects, but in many cases it was far from being severely accurate. In this instance his knowledge of his subject was not equal to his dislike of the author. His review—which appeared in the number for January, 1804—while exceedingly severe, and indulging in some unjustifiable personalities, was attended by the novel result of giving to the work a credit in some respects to which it was not entitled. Southey, who shared Scott's feelings towards the author, criticised it full as unfavorably. His notice appeared in the second volume of the 'Annual Review.'<sup>1</sup> This same periodical, in its general summing up in another place of the biographical work of the year, spoke of it as a life "on a new plan, which we trust will forever remain unique"<sup>2</sup>—a wish which has unfortunately not been realized. Charles Lamb, a personal friend of Godwin, seems to have had it in mind also to write a criticism of the biography for one of the newspapers. It is doubtful if he ever carried out his intention, and it is certain that if he did, no one has as yet succeeded in discovering the article. His objection to one feature of the work was communicated, however, to the author himself in a private letter. "I may be wrong," he wrote under date of November 10, 1803, "but I think there is one considerable error runs through it, which is a conjecturing spirit, a fondness for filling out the picture by supposing what Chaucer did and how he felt where the materials are scanty."<sup>3</sup> Lamb inadvertently reveals

<sup>1</sup> Page 483.

<sup>2</sup> Page 456.

and *Contemporaries*. By C. Kegan

<sup>3</sup> *William Godwin, his Friends* Paul, vol. ii., p. 103.

that this same characteristic had been made the subject of domestic criticism; for he adds that he had been asked by Mrs. Godwin if there was not too much fancy in the work. This is a feature of it, indeed, which can hardly fail to impress itself upon the most careless reader; and the biography would not have required so full a notice here had it not contained some new information, which has had the effect of causing it to be regarded as an authority upon points that have no evidence whatever in their support.

For Godwin did not fill up his volumes entirely with what he knew or thought he knew about the Middle Ages. He added something specific to our knowledge of the poet by printing a few official documents which had never before been brought to light. They were not numerous, and most of them had been referred to by previous writers. But they were lying in obscurity, and it was from this state that he rescued them. There was nothing in his work more interesting, however, than the gallant way in which he struggled with the difficulties which the very records he had himself unearthed raised in the way of his theories. Especially is this the case in the story of Chaucer's flight and imprisonment. It was in the beginning of 1384 that the disturbances in the city of London had taken place. It was then that John of Northampton had been the candidate for lord mayor. It was in the middle of that same year that this popular leader was brought to trial and sentenced to imprisonment. It would have been reasonable to suppose, Godwin justly remarked, that the flight of Chaucer began about the time of the arrest of the man whose cause he had

supported. But the records of the reign of Richard II. showed that in November, 1384, leave of absence for one month from the duties of his office had been granted the poet on the ground of urgent business connected with his private affairs. Accordingly, he must then have been in London. But the biographer felt that it was incumbent to exile him, and therefore inclined to the belief that Chaucer took advantage of this leave of absence to withdraw to the Continent. So nine months after the arrest, and three months after the trial and imprisonment of the ringleader in whose plot he was concerned, the poet, without any apparently adequate motive, got a leave of absence from his duties in order to run away from his native land. Even this was not all. Godwin learned from the records that Chaucer was not deprived of his office as controller of the customs; and, moreover, that in the beginning of 1385 he was granted the special favor of executing its functions by deputy. But his faith in the commonly received story was of the kind that removes mountains. Difficulties in the narrative did not shake his belief, impossibilities only made it dearer. There was not a single point at which he hesitated. He put Chaucer's flight in November, 1384, and asserted that the time of his exile lasted two years. He even went so far as to assure us that he doubtless took his wife with him, though he qualified the positiveness of this statement by the condition that he took her with him if she were still living. The reasons given for it were full as convincing as those advanced for most of the alleged facts contained in this narrative. Though prudence would have dictated the separation, the poet

“was too deeply pervaded with the human and domestic affections to be able to consent to such a measure.” The taking with him of his wife necessarily involved the taking also of his little son, Lewis, who was then about four years old. On one point the biographer was not entirely confident. He could not be absolutely certain that the poet was accompanied by his elder son, Thomas. Godwin, having started the family on their travels, landed them at last in Zealand. His account of them after their arrival there does not differ from the one that had usually been given, save in the greater minuteness of detail which it furnished. He returned the poet to England in 1386, where he had him immediately arrested and confined, though he added that he had searched in vain among the records for the warrant committing him to prison. There he made him remain until 1389, when, after confessing his treason and exposing his accomplices, he was set at liberty; and in June of that year he composed the ‘Testament of Love,’ though it was not published before 1393.

It was not merely that this elaborate story was a fiction throughout, which made its constant reappearance disagreeable. From its very nature it conveyed an imputation upon the character of the man which every admirer of the poet felt called upon to apologize for and explain away, so far as lay in his power. As a matter of fact, all sorts of palliating circumstances were introduced by every one of his biographers. The men whose secrets Chaucer was suffering exile to secure, it was asserted, had proved unfaithful to him as well as ungrateful. They had withheld from him the money that was



his due; they had left him to encounter distress and even starvation in a foreign land; they had by these means plotted directly or indirectly to bring about his death. Excuses of this kind could not be deemed satisfactory; for they were founded entirely upon the necessarily one-sided statements of the man who admitted that he had betrayed his associates. But the need of all explanation and apology was finally to pass away. In 1844, the distinguished antiquary, Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, published a memoir of Chaucer which was prefixed the following year to the Aldine edition of his poetical works. It was largely based upon official documents that had never before been printed, and for this purpose had probably never even been perused. The biography, it must be confessed, was not particularly entertaining. But dry as it was, it was far more destructive. The whole edifice of fiction that had been so carefully reared toppled at once. The records that were published destroyed forever any autobiographic value that could be attached to the 'Testament of Love,' at least as regards Chaucer. They demonstrated beyond question that during the time he was supposed to be in exile he was living in London; that from 1380 to 1388 he received half of his pension, semi-annually, with his own hands; that he was holding his offices in the customs from 1382 to 1386; and that in the last-named year, when he was theoretically in prison in the Tower, he was actually a member of Parliament, as knight of the shire for the county of Kent.

Let it not be inferred, however, that because this story has been shown to be false, that therefore it has

ceased to exist. This would be an impression quite contrary to fact. Nearly half a century has gone by since Nicolas demonstrated that the events this narrative pretended to record were such as could not possibly have happened. The proof was contained in a memoir prefixed to what has been, since its appearance, one of the most widely circulated editions of Chaucer's complete poetical works. The facts have, therefore, long been published and have been easily accessible. Yet it is entirely within bounds to say that three fourths of the sketches of the poet's life, which have appeared up to 1880, and perhaps to the present time, set forth his flight and exile and imprisonment as actual occurrences. The story will doubtless die out only in the same gradual way in which it arose. The falsehood, indeed, has occasionally had modern defenders. An effort has been made to transfer the incidents told in the narrative to a date a few years later. They have been represented as occurring between 1386 and 1388, when we know little about the poet beyond the fact that he had lost his places in the customs, and was apparently in pecuniary straits. This theory never had anything to recommend it save its novelty. Of evidence in its favor, there was none; but modern criticism, by its investigation in another field, has rendered it unnecessary any longer to expose the falsity of the various devices which may be employed to save the credit of a discreditable and now discredited story.

For up to a comparatively late period, no doubt had been entertained of the genuineness of the treatise upon which the story of Chaucer's flight and imprisonment

had been founded; at least no doubt had been expressed publicly, whatever may have been the views privately entertained. Sir Harris Nicolas had denied the autobiographic value of the 'Testament of Love,' which he spoke of as an allegorical composition, of which it was equally difficult to comprehend the meaning or the purport. Still, in spite of the disrespectful estimate he expressed of the work, he did not go so far as to deny its authenticity. But in 1866, a German version of the 'Canterbury Tales,' was published. To it Wilhelm Hertzberg, the translator, prefixed an introduction, in which he discussed, with a good deal of fulness, several points in the poet's life and writings. As a result of his studies, he was led to maintain not merely that the 'Testament of Love' had no value as illustrating passages in Chaucer's career, but also that it was not written by Chaucer at all. He pointed out how insignificant was the evidence in its favor. This is, in truth, based mainly upon the passage in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis,' in which Venus is represented as commissioning the author to tell his brother poet to produce a treatise of this character. There is no proof that the latter performed, or even contemplated performing, the task assigned him. The remark was, however, sufficient in all probability, for the early editors to include an anonymous treatise with this title among the works of Chaucer. Against its being his production, Hertzberg brought forward three reasons. The first was, that it is not mentioned by Lydgate, who, in his prologue to his translation of Boccaccio's 'Fall of Princes,' specifically named both the poetical and the prose writings of his great

predecessor. The second was, that the author of the 'Testament of Love,' whoever he was, invariably spoke of himself in the first person. He thereby separated himself from Chaucer, of whom he spoke in the third. And, lastly, the manner in which he spoke of him was in terms of the very highest praise, in words, indeed, which would not only be out of taste as coming from the poet's own mouth, but wholly out of character. For while in Chaucer there are frequent references to himself, these references, so far from being of a self-asserting nature, are almost invariably depreciatory. In this respect they present a particularly marked contrast to the passage in which he is mentioned in the 'Testament of Love.' This occurs in the third book, which is largely taken up with the discussion of the questions of God's foreknowledge and of man's free-will, but does no more than suggest their inevitable entail of endless controversy as to the origin of evil. To the query propounded by the writer whether, if certain points of view are insisted on, it does not follow necessarily that God is the maker and author of bad works, and therefore cannot rightfully punish the evil doings of mankind, Love rather cleverly shifts the burden of reply to Chaucer's shoulders. The passage in which this reference to the poet occurs, reads as follows:

"Quoth Love, I shall tell thee, this lesson to learn, mine own true servant, the noble philosophical poet in English, which evermore him busieth and travaileth right sore my name to increase; wherefore all that willen me good, owe to do him worship and reverence both: truly his better ne his peer in school of my rules could



I never find ; he, quoth she, in a treatise that he made of my servant Troilus hath this matter touched, and at the full this question assoiled. Certainly his noble sayings can I not amend: in goodness of gentle manly speech without any nicety of stariereres imagination, in wit and in good reason of sentence he passeth all other makers."

To those who are familiar with Chaucer's writings and with his manner of speaking of himself, it seems incredible that a paragraph like the one just given could have come from his pen. The imputation to him of it implies, moreover, an additional absurdity which was unnoticed by Hertzberg. The arguments contained in the principal passages in the 'Troilus and Cressida,' for which the poet is so highly praised, and in which he is represented as having solved the problem of the ages, are not strictly his own arguments. They are nothing more than free versions of the discussion of this same subject, made by Boethius in the 'Consolation of Philosophy.' If, therefore, the 'Testament of Love' is to be regarded as Chaucer's, we are inevitably led to conclusions that do not tend to enhance our opinion of the character of the poet for modesty, for honesty, or even for ordinary sense. We should have him praising himself in the grossest terms, and praising himself for ideas which were not his own, which he knew perfectly well were not his own, and which he would be certain that his readers would come to know were not his own; for to them his translation of the 'Consolation of Philosophy' would be fully as familiar as the work he was then engaged in writing.

For the reasons given above, Hertzberg came to the conclusion that the 'Testament of Love' was not a production of Chaucer. He is, so far as I know, the first person who ever gave published expression to his disbelief in the authenticity of this work. Whatever honor, therefore, accrues to the priority of declaration belongs justly to him. At the same time similar results had been reached independently in England. In August, 1867, the date of the introduction to his reprint of the seven poetical miscellanies of the Elizabethan period, Mr. John Payne Collier had given utterance to conclusions which agreed with those of Hertzberg upon this point.<sup>1</sup> There is little doubt, indeed, that even then the feeling had come to be entertained by those who had actually read the 'Testament of Love' that it was not a work of Chaucer's. There is certainly now a universal agreement among the special students of his writings that it is not his production, but that of some contemporary and admirer. As yet this can hardly be said to be the view everywhere taken; but the failure to accept it is mainly due to the fact that the conclusion reached is only partially known. Still, it continues to be opposed by a few men of letters who have paid some attention to Chaucer and his period. It is, therefore, desirable to point out here the reasons which would naturally lead to disbelief in the authenticity of the 'Testament of Love' outside of those advanced by Hertzberg. These are based mainly upon the peculiarities of language and style exhibited in the work. They are very

<sup>1</sup> See, also, Collier, in *Notes and Queries*, Oct. 17, 1868, and March 27, 1869.

marked, and especially marked when contrasted with similar works of the poet, the genuineness of which is not and cannot be disputed.

The art of writing prose is always of comparatively late development. It usually takes many years of literary culture before it is ever done at all; centuries certainly before it is done well. No more striking illustration of this truth can be found in the history of our own literature than in the writings of Chaucer himself. His prose works not only have nothing of the deeper qualities of his poetry, but they show but few traces of its lightness and grace, its fancy and its fun. It may be said that the treatise on the 'Astrolabe,' designed, as it was, merely for instruction, does not afford any opportunity for the exhibition of these characteristics; and that in his version of the 'Consolation of Philosophy' the poet was necessarily held in restraint by the necessity which the translator labors under of reproducing the original. But there are two prose pieces included in the 'Canterbury Tales'—the tale of Melibeus, and the Parson's tale; and not only are they the least read, they are the least worth reading. It is, in fact, hardly an exaggeration to say that they are never read at all save by professed students of the poet's writings. Men now talk of the shackles of verse. The linguistic and literary revolution that has taken place since the fourteenth century is nowhere so strikingly brought to notice as in the restraint which was laid upon Chaucer's genius by the shackles of prose. The tale of Melibeus is very much in the nature of those impositions that some modern novels have made familiar to all of

us, in which, when we ask for bread in the shape of a story, we get a stone in the shape of a sermon. The Parson's tale is, perhaps, duller as a whole. Nothing much more wearisome can well be imagined than the worthy priest's disquisition upon the various venial and deadly sins to which man's nature is exposed, and the various remedies against them. For the ordinary reader it is one long dead level of tediousness, save in two or three places where the preacher steps aside to denounce some particular manifestation of evil, as, for instance, that of "outrageous array of clothing." To the student of beliefs and customs this production is undoubtedly of value. But it is rarely literary value that it possesses. It is in vain to defend these prose pieces by saying that they are, or may be, merely translations. So is the Clerk's tale a translation. The Knight's tale is a paraphrase. The same course of amplification, omission, variation, and adornment was open to Chaucer in the treatment of his prose versions as in that of his poetical ones. That he did not avail himself of it in the one case, and did avail himself of it in the other, is of itself proof how little, comparatively, was the mastery in that form he had gained of the instrument of expression which had been placed in his hands.

Nevertheless, it should in justice be added that there is a certain quaintness about Chaucer's prose which has an interest of its own. This is probably due full as much to the language of his age as to any special characteristics of his own style. But there are other merits distinguishing it, for which no one, save himself, can receive the credit. Whatever else may be said about Chaucer's



prose, it is perfectly intelligible. He was never in any doubt as to his own meaning, and, little plastic as the language then was, had command enough of it to express that meaning clearly to others. Especially was he too full of the simplicity of genius to make that pretense to profundity which consists in stating the most ordinary commonplaces in the most oppressively solemn manner. In this respect, particularly, the 'Testament of Love' is altogether different from any of the prose works of the poet which we know to be certainly his. It never escapes from being commonplace except by becoming obscure. A few persons have read it; but no one apparently has ever understood it. Its form and subject matter are of a kind to deter investigation. Allegory is doubtful, metaphysics are dry; and the union of the two in this one treatise has resulted in making it one of the darkest and dullest productions that can be found in the whole range of early, if not of all, English literature. Moreover, in addition to the difficulty of understanding it, the mind of the reader is constantly haunted by the suspicion which paralyzes all continuous effort, that after the task of making out the meaning shall have been accomplished, it will be found not to have been worth making out. The text is possibly in a corrupt state. If so, it cannot well be corrected, for no manuscript of it is known to exist. Certainly, parts of it in their present form are incomprehensible. There are passages from which, as they appear, no one can get an intelligible idea, conceding that in their original shape they expressed an intelligible idea. The style may be described in general terms as being a vicious speci-

men of a vicious kind. Sentences are not only long, but are inextricably involved. In many places the grammar is in a hopelessly muddled condition. Adjectives are torn away from the nouns which they qualify, or are left without anything to qualify at all. Substantives, which seem to be designed to stand for the subject of the sentence, present themselves without any verb to be attached to, and are finally shut out from sight, and lost to memory by intervening masses of parenthetical clauses that rise up on every side. Very few readers, in consequence, have the patience to trust themselves for any length of time to this stream of muddy metaphysics, that winds its way through a channel of still muddier syntax to nowhere in particular.

Nor is it merely the style of the 'Testament of Love' which is entirely different from that of the prose works that are unquestionably Chaucer's. Full as important as this are the points of disagreement as to matters of fact. Mr. Brae, the editor of the treatise on the 'Astrolabe,' has pointed out that the planetary hours, as described, and correctly described, by Chaucer, are not at all like the description given of them in the 'Testament of Love.' It is also to be observed that by no stretch of language can the poet with our present knowledge be said to have held any position which would justify him in speaking of himself as having "administered the office of common doing, as in ruling the establishments among the people." Yet, as we have seen, this is the very indefinite post which the writer of the treatise under consideration asserts that he filled. Whatever it was, it could not have been the controllership of the port of

London. Yet, after all, with the special student of Chaucer's writings the impression which is derived from difference of manner will always weigh more than any ordinary presumptions, based upon difficulties found in the matter. The essential disagreement is in the clearness with which the ideas are expressed. In the case of the poet, the reader never reaches the end of the sentence, there to make the discovery that he has lost sight of the sense by the way. The reverse is true in the case of the writer of the 'Testament of Love.' He was to an abject extent the slave of his language. He had no mastery over it, no power to mould it into the shape best suited to convey his meaning. Not unfrequently when he began a sentence he was dominated by some word or clause that suggested a new thought or a modification of the previous thought, and was carried away by it to an entirely different point from that for which he set out: so that the reader who embarks on the stream of his statement can never be quite sure as to where he is to be landed. At the very opening of the prologue to his book he took pains to say that such skill in writing is attained by some that the subject of which they treat is not heeded at all; but he flattered himself that his manner of composition was so poor that it would have the effect of turning the attention of his readers to the matter. It is a curious comment upon this anticipated result that the "rude words and boistous," on which he rather prided himself, are so put together that no one has as yet been fully able to comprehend what they are written about. The author, whoever he was, apparently never lived to complete a second treatise,

✓ which near the beginning of the second book he threatened; or, if he did, it has fortunately perished.

It would simply be unjust and unfair to convey the idea that the 'Testament of Love' has not many portions which are clearly expressed. It would be even more unfair at a period like this, when poets are no longer born, but are discovered—when there is no production of our early literature, whether in prose or verse, so tedious and stupid that it does not find admirers—to imply that there are not those who see in this treatise numerous passages of great beauty. Still, it is safe to say that, like many far more famous works, it has been admired chiefly by those who have not read it. But whatever may be its value in itself, its value as throwing any light whatever upon Chaucer's career is now forever gone. Whether the story it tells or implies be a real or fictitious one, it is one with which the poet has no concern. But it is little creditable to literary history that the carelessness of the first editor in admitting into the collection of his works a treatise that did not belong to it, and the ingenuity of later biographers in deducing from this unauthentic production unfounded inferences, have combined to cast for nearly two centuries upon the foremost writer of our early speech a stain which has not yet been wholly effaced.

The creation of the story just told, which would have been false even had its source been genuine, ought to be of itself a sufficient demonstration of the folly of concocting biographical details by culling scattered sentences from an author's works, composed at different, and, in the case of Chaucer, at unknown times, and then



patching them together so as to form a connected domestic chronicle. In this instance it has been worse than folly. No misfortunes that the poet endured in life have been equal to those which he has met since his death at the hands of his biographers. Yet there is little prospect that the lesson will be heeded. So long as knowledge is lacking, we may be sure that conjecture will do all it can to supply its place. As in the past, so in the future, it will doubtless continue to go over the same ground, and present us in new form the same old and exploded results. A single illustration will suffice. Godwin, that most fanciful of biographers, had, from a careful study of three productions of the poet, been led to form certain conclusions about his courtship and marriage, which he announced with as much positiveness as if Chaucer had communicated to him the facts personally. These three poems were, the 'Parliament of Fowls,' the so-called 'Dream,' and the 'Death of Blanche the Duchess.' In his opinion, they constituted a complete series, which threw ample light upon the history of the author to the full satisfaction of every reasonable mind. The date of their composition was sufficiently established by the unequivocal references contained in them to the courtship and marriage of John of Gaunt. In the first, the 'Parliament of Fowls,' written in 1358, Chaucer is an utter stranger to the passion of love. In the second, the 'Dream,' he is suffering from it in its extremest form. His nights are sleepless, and the pillows are wet with his tears. In the third poem, which was composed ten years later, he continues to remain a lover, and likewise an unrequited

one. He is still unable to get his natural sleep. After the lapse of so long a time, he very naturally expresses wonder how he has managed to survive under such unfavorable conditions. In the exordium of this production he thus discusses the subject :

“ But men might asken me, why so  
I may not sleep, and what me is.  
But natheless who asketh this,  
Leseth<sup>1</sup> his asking truëly ;  
My selven can not tellè why  
The sooth ; but truly, as I guess,  
I hold it be a sicknéss  
That I have suffered this eight year,  
And yet my boot<sup>2</sup> is never the near.<sup>3</sup>  
For there is physicián but one  
That may me heal ; but that is done ;  
Pass we over until eft ;  
That will not be mote<sup>4</sup> needs be left.”

Godwin was properly indignant with the poet for making himself out to have been miserable for only eight years, when he had actually been suffering terribly for ten. A difference so slight as this, however, could not outweigh the probability in favor of his hypothesis. So he went on to tell us that the lady was of high rank, and that, although she was impressed by the devotion of a man of her suitor's character and ability, she nevertheless constantly eluded all efforts on his part to bring the courtship to a definite conclusion. Still, she was mild in her refusal. Her only reason, indeed, for keeping him waiting so long was a scruple of delicacy

<sup>1</sup> Loses.

<sup>2</sup> Remedy.

<sup>3</sup> Nearer.

<sup>4</sup> Must.

about leaving the service of her royal mistress; for she was in attendance upon the queen. Fortunately for the pair, that exalted lady finally died. Then, to use Godwin's words, "their nuptials were celebrated as soon as the general laws of decorum and the ideas of female delicacy would allow."

The fact that one of these poems is now known not to have been written by Chaucer does not disturb the validity of the argument by which these conclusions were reached. It would have been just as strong, in fact, if none of the three had been written by him. We may be sure, as the poet himself forewarns us, that he who seeks to discover the source of the real or imaginary depression and inability to sleep, mentioned in the lines quoted, "leseth his asking truly." If Chaucer with all the facts before him could come no nearer to the cause than a guess, it may be well for us, who have no facts before us at all, to take a lesson from his self-restraint. The story, indeed, would not deserve the slight notice it has received here had it not been revived essentially within the past few years. Dates and poems undergo a more or less partial change, but the harrowing details remain the same. The high-born lady now, as then, puts in her appearance, and continues to inflict misery upon the hapless lover. Only in the modern version of the myth the result is more tragic. Godwin made the lady succumb after this ten years of persistent wooing. Now we are told that it is the poet that succumbs and marries another woman, if, indeed, he has not been already married the whole time, and been suffering all these torments for somebody else than

his wife. It is hardly necessary to add that in either version the story has no external evidence upon which to found it, no internal evidence to confirm it, and no intrinsic probability to recommend it. The tale throughout, in any form, is as artificial and unsubstantial as any that ever came from the unreal world of dreams.

This matter needs to be stated sharply and strongly, because as this has not been the first, so it will be far from being the last of the fantastic theories which will be sure to arise from time to time in the case of a poet of whose life we know so little as we do of Chaucer's. The principles which underlie all proof in the interpretation of any allusions made by an author to himself are by no means difficult to find. They are, indeed, so commonplace that it almost appears absurd to mention them; they rest so conspicuously upon the surface that it would seem to require ingenuity to miss them. Yet they are constantly overlooked or persistently defied; and the neglect of them, from whichever cause arising, has again and again brought discredit upon literary investigations. With a precise knowledge of certain circumstances in the life of a man, it is usually a matter of comparative ease to tell whether they are referred to or not in his writings. But if the circumstances are not known, the task of making them out from allusions or supposed allusions becomes not only a blind one, but in most instances is sure to be a misleading one. Especially must this be the case when the allusion is not to fact, but to feeling. The power of genius to project itself into states of mind which, at the time, it is not only not going through, but which it has actually never gone



through, of giving utterance to emotions which it has itself never experienced, is one of its most signal characteristics. A sorry life would have to be attributed to most poets if they were compelled to assume personal responsibility for the views and sentiments they express in their writings. If that be the case, most of us ought certainly to be thankful that our faculty of production is limited to prose. When special events are spoken of, there is naturally little danger of mistaking the reference, if the events themselves are known. But if they are not known, the information conveyed by the allusion may vary all the way from a certainty essentially absolute to the barest possibility. No one has any doubt that Milton means himself when he speaks of his blindness in the apostrophe to light with which the third book of the 'Paradise Lost' opens. Even if we did not know the fact beforehand, we might feel reasonably sure of it from the language there used. Or, let us take a reference of a more obscure nature from Chaucer himself. We know that from 1374 until 1386 he was controller of the customs for the port of London. When, therefore, in his 'House of Fame,' the poet reports the eagle as saying to him,

"For when thy labor all done is  
And hast ymadè reckoníngès,  
Instead of rest and newè thingès,  
Thou goest home to thy house anon,  
And also dumb as any stone  
Thou sittest at another book,"

it is a reasonable inference that he was here referring to

the particular duties connected with the office mentioned, and that, in consequence, the poem was written somewhere between the dates above given. Yet such a conclusion is at best only a probability of a high grade; certainty is a term that can never be justly applied to it.

But the moment that allusion is made to sentiment, the task of explanation can never be successfully achieved without a knowledge of the facts. In the most favorable point of view it can be no more than a happy guess, and can have no further rightful claim to acceptance than that which attaches to a guess. Knowing as we do the circumstances of Milton's career, and the date of the composition of the poem, we plainly understand the references in 'Samson Agonistes' to the evil times upon which he had fallen, to the unjust tribunals that had brought his friends to the block, and to the fickleness of an ungrateful people which had changed its sentiments with its rulers. But when Chaucer, in the 'House of Fame,' speaks of himself as "utterly desperat of alle bliss," we are equally at a loss to know the particular experience in his career to which he alludes, or whether he alludes to himself at all, or whether he means anything if he does allude to himself. As well might one hope to squeeze rain from a Saharic sand-cloud, as out of materials so empty and juiceless as these to gather the details for the narrative of a life.

Untrustworthy, moreover, as are all such references to personal feelings, they are especially so when the feeling referred to is that of love. Least of all can any allusion to it be submitted to strict interpretation and rigid analysis when we are unacquainted with the real

facts. For the passion, while varying the widest of all in internal experience, varies the least of all in the range of its expression. The idle fancy of a moment, or the absorbing devotion of a life is apt to find voice for the time being in almost the same terms. Within this limited range, besides, the intensity of utterance varies not so much with the intensity of the passion as with the capacity of the individual to give it vivid representation. For this reason alone, the power of expression possessed by the poet as poet must always make us doubly careful concerning the weight to be attached to his words. Even could we be sure in any given instance that he was referring to his own experience, we could form no certain conclusion as to its precise nature or duration. The mind of the poet which makes him so sensitive to the objects that surround him, and the impressions that act upon him, likewise makes him usually a worthless witness in his own case. Nor do we need to go to the writings of men of genius to learn that many persons can put very shallow feeling on the subject of love into very intense language. Easier than any other, this kind of poetry can be made a fashion. It has been so at some period in the literature of many races. It formed the main staple of the school of Petrarch; and as a sort of offshoot of that, no more striking illustration of it can be found than in the productions of the English court poets of the former half of the sixteenth century. That the sentiment then was as superficial as the expression of it was exaggerated is clear enough now; that in this respect it differed materially from much of the love poetry that has been pro-

duced both before and since is, however, not so evident.

References to love and its torments are too customary on the part of every versifier of every nation to justify any expression of any author being taken by itself as evidence from which to draw conclusions. It was in Italy that this fashion reached in the fourteenth century a very high development. But though it showed itself at the same period in English, it was not until the sixteenth century that the seed brought from the South had sprung up and reached its full growth and bloom in the colder clime of the North. Singular would be the result if to the whole works of Surrey and Wyatt and other poets of that period were applied the same principles of interpretation which have yielded such rich returns when applied to a few scattered passages in Chaucer. No ampler field, certainly, can be offered anywhere to him who is on the lookout for suggestion and who revels in inference. The verse of that time was mainly employed in depicting the sentiment of love. Every variation of tune the world-old passion has played upon the human heart found expression in song. The special subject of the poet was generally complaint of cruelty in some form on the part of his mistress. In the exaggerated language then prevailing, all nature sympathized with the sorrowing lover. At his unhappy state the rivers stopped in their course, earth wept in dew, and forests sighed for grief. The tale of Orpheus was renewed again; only in this time, rock, tree, and stream danced no longer with joy at the magic music of the singer, but conducted themselves in the most



dismal manner to accord with his misery. And, clearly, his condition, as depicted by himself in these poems, was sad enough to justify a good deal of depression on the part of inanimate nature. At night he tossed, he turned, he groaned. Sleep failed him entirely, or fearful dreams haunted his slumbers. Agues burned him, chills froze him, mind and body were both in a hell of torment. He woke from his restless sleep in tears and complaints, crying out, "Alas! alas!" His utterances during the day were generally sobs and sighs, intermingled with occasional curses at his ill-fortune. Absent from his mistress, his sufferings were doubled. When he was present with her, her conduct only added fuel to the fires of misery that were wasting him to ashes. At times, he resolved that he would renounce forever one who used a despairing lover so cruelly. At other times he was determined that no pain, however great, no treatment, however capricious and cruel, should cause him to waver in his constant faith. On the contrary, when he was fortunate, he was not much more profitably employed. Instead of sleeping, he spent the night in meditating upon the perfections of his mistress, the beauties of her person, and the graces of her mind. But rarely was it the case that he was fortunate. Chaucer's misery, as depicted in modern romantic biography, is not to be compared for one moment with the sufferings which all the men of that time seem to have undergone as a regular part of life's experience. Judging from internal evidence which the writings of the period furnish in abundance, we cannot resist the conclusion that the mistresses of the poets of the sixteenth century were hardened to

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entreaty and pitiless to prayer to an extent of which no previous or later record exists in the amatory annals of the English race. No less an agency than that which shakes the earth, or melts the elements with fervent heat, would seem to have had power to move them in the slightest degree. The whole stock in trade of poetical simile was exhausted in vain efforts to give an adequate conception of their cruelty. Water, we are told, by continual dropping will wear away the solid rock. Humbleness of demeanor will sometimes turn to pity the raging fury of the lion. There are circumstances under which even the tiger lays aside his native ferocity. But no such display of weakness is recorded of the fair ones whom the poet of that day sang. Time, which crumbles everything else, could not even soften their hearts; entire submission could not make them relent, nor opportunity dispose them to be favorable. Death seemed to be the lover's only remedy for the cruelty of his mistress; and even to the bitterness of death was added the keener pang that she would regard it not.

These are no mere inferences. They are direct statements scattered by scores up and down these poems, and repeated again and again with every conceivable sort of variation. But in spite of them nobody seriously believes that a single one of the sturdy warriors and statesmen of the time of Henry VIII., who were full as hard-hearted as they were hard-headed, ever lost half a dozen nights' sleep in consequence of the affection he bore to his mistress. We feel the absurdity in this case where there is nothing more remarkable about the evidence than its abundance, the positiveness with

which it is set forth, and the fulness and precision with which the details are given. In Chaucer's writings there is no approach to this wealth of testimony, even where he makes the most pointed personal references to the subject of love. In some of these, moreover—noticeably in the 'Complaint to Pity'—it is not the language of real passion that is heard, but fantastic utterances of an emotion which is painfully put through its paces, or conventional descriptions of a state of feeling which were never expected to be taken seriously. The absurdity of the theory which represents the poet as the victim of an unrequited passion becomes by this comparison almost painfully marked. In his case, we are required to take as proof the most uncertain of allusions to matters we know nothing about; while, in the other, we are expected to disbelieve the most definite and positive of assertions. There can, in fact, be hardly any grosser conceivable travesty of reasoning than to furnish with our present knowledge, as a contribution to Chaucer's personal history, an elaborate story of love and misery, founded upon detached passages of doubtful import in poems whose dates of composition are unascertained, and apparently unascertainable; which are, moreover, so vague in meaning that they would easily lend themselves to the support of any theory of any kind to him who first forms for himself a hypothesis about the poet's life, and then reads his writings with the object of finding proofs of its correctness.

One of the most dismal results of the progress of knowledge is to unlearn a great deal of what we supposed we knew. Every generation has laid upon it the

necessity of pulling down what preceding generations have toiled laboriously, but unwisely, to build up. The life of Chaucer is a specially conspicuous illustration of the truth of this fact. In the biography of no other man of letters can there, perhaps, be found such a record as is contained in the foregoing pages. These contain little more than a long list of the wrecks which modern investigation has made in the beliefs of the past. The results cannot be disputed, though such is the vitality of falsehood it may be long before they will be universally known and heeded. In this chapter it is not alone the particulars of the legendary life of Chaucer which have been furnished, with all the variations and modifications they underwent at different periods. The date has been given, so far as possible, when every fictitious assertion first appeared, with the circumstances to which it owed its being. The authority upon which every statement made about the poet was originally based has been traced and brought to light. The story as a whole does not make a particularly creditable chapter in English literary history. It is not merely that with the advance of knowledge details, once universally received, have turned out to be false in point of fact; it is far worse to find that many of them never had in the first instance as an excuse for their origin and acceptance that decent degree of probability which is demanded in fiction. The honest acknowledgment of ignorance has been avoided wherever possible. The place of certain fact has been taken by the trivial or ridiculous results of conjectural biography. This has scattered over every period of Chaucer's career details of hardships he never encoun-



tered, and of miseries he never felt. It is hardly worth while at this late day to renew the practices of the past ; to fancy that fertility of assertion can be regarded as a satisfactory equivalent for barrenness of information ; to revive, in particular, a discarded story of the poet's failure in love to fill the gap made by the disappearance of the exploded story of his failure in politics. No conjectural narrative of this sort is needed, as some seem to think, to account for that undertone of pathos and sadness which is heard in so many of his works. That would naturally be found in the writings of any man of genius, and most of all in those of one who shows in manifold instances that he was a profound and sympathetic observer of the care and sorrow that go to make up so much of human life. So far from that, the baselessness of the story, when the evidence in its favor is examined, becomes especially marked by the intrinsic improbability of Chaucer having gone through eight years of constant mental suffering, and yet exhibiting no vestige of its effects in what he produced. No healthier nature than his can be found in the whole range of our literature among the poets whose personality appears prominent in their writings. There is not a trace of morbid feeling in his lines, which still glow for us with all the freshness of immortal youth. The sadness and misery of the times in which he lived, and his own personal misfortunes, which must have been many, seem never to have dimmed the clearness of his vision, never to have depressed the cheerfulness of his spirit, never to have led him to fall in with the gloomy anticipations so common with even the greatest of his contemporaries,

who fancied, in looking upon the wide ravages of pestilence and war, that the opening of the seven seals had begun, and that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. In that serene air of calm, we can afford to let him dwell. Whatever theory we may form, for our own gratification, to explain his words and acts, let us leave entirely the field of conjecture in recounting to others the story of his life, and frankly admit that we know nothing where it is impossible for us to know anything.

III.

THE TEXT OF CHAUCER





## THE TEXT OF CHAUCER.

THERE are two well-known passages in Chaucer's writings which give expression to feelings that must have been common to authors before the age of manuscript had given way to the age of printing. The first of these is found near the conclusion of his 'Troilus and Cr  ssida.' There the poet makes an almost pathetic appeal for the preservation of his sense by the copyist and for the observance of his rhythm by the reader. After a short address to his little book he goes on to say,

"And for there is so great diversity  
In English, and in writing of our tongue,  
So pray I God that none miswrit   thee,  
Ne thee mismeter for default of tongue."

The latter misfortune—that of bad reading—was a calamity from which the best of texts could never have secured the author. In Chaucer's age, moreover, it was naturally a far more serious matter than it could possibly be regarded now. There is plenty of evidence in his own writings to show that the knowledge of his works—what we should call the publication of them—was largely due to recitation and little to perusal. The poet, on one occasion, declines to be as pathetic as he can, be-

cause his hearers, not his readers, would find it impossible to stay in the room and listen. In 'Anelida and Arcite' he is speaking of the sorrow experienced by the heroine on account of the inconstancy of the hero. He first asserts the inability of any one to do justice to the subject, and then in the following words expresses the undesirability of doing it if it could be done :

"Or what man might within the chamber dwell,  
If I to him rehearsen should the hell,  
Which suffereth fair Anelida, the queen,  
For false Arcite that did her all this teen?"

References of this kind to the recitation of verses are frequent, as might be expected in a period when men were illiterate without being ignorant. Still, the harm wrought to the poet's reputation by bad elocution was one which he might reasonably feel would grow steadily less with the constant increase of the ability to ascertain the meaning of the author through the agency of the eye and not of the ear. Not so, however, with the production of an erroneous text. That was an injury which the lapse of time would have a tendency to increase rather than diminish. The second, therefore, of the two passages to which reference has been made has a special interest as apparently indicating that long experience had revealed to Chaucer how hopeless was the struggle which accuracy has to carry on with the indifference and carelessness that attend the perfunctory performance of duty. It is the following little poem, addressed to Adam, the scrivener who copied his manuscript :

"Adam scrivener, if ever it thee befall,  
Boece or Troilus for to writè new,  
Under thy long locks thou must have the scall,  
But<sup>1</sup> after my making<sup>2</sup> thou write more true;  
So oft a day I mote<sup>3</sup> thy work renew,  
It to correct and eke to rub and scrape,  
And all is through thy negligence and rape."<sup>4</sup>

The entreaty found in the first passage, it will be seen, exists no longer in the second. Deprecation has given place to denunciation.

This poetical address to the scrivener is evidence of an unmistakable character as to the anxiety that must have always burdened the mind of the author during the existence of the age of manuscript. Chaucer's expression of it is much the best known, but is by no means unexampled. Anathemas against negligence of transcription are to be found in ancient manuscripts, and directions in regard to copying correctly are not unfrequent. The constant presence of feelings of this kind is something that most of us are apt to lose sight of entirely, and none of us, perhaps, to comprehend fully. The art of printing has made it a matter so comparatively easy to preserve the original text, or, in any case of doubt, to ascertain it, that the reader of to-day is often at a loss to understand the difficulty that exists in securing a correct reproduction of an ancient work. A little reflection will suggest some of the obstacles in the way. Even modern appliances and facilities are not always successful in obtaining absolute accuracy, though

<sup>1</sup> Unless.

<sup>2</sup> Composition.

<sup>3</sup> Must.

<sup>4</sup> Hastiness.

they go a long distance towards reducing inaccuracy to the smallest possible limits. Mistakes made in the manuscript are with us corrected in the proof. The proof undergoes revision several times and often by several persons. The corrected text in its complete state is finally examined by the author. Yet in spite of all these precautions errors creep in. There is hardly a book printed the first impression of which does not contain blunders that strike the eye of its composer, or rather glare upon it, only when they have been embalmed in the irrevocability of the published page. In the case of a great classic there is still further danger. Changes in the text are made sometimes by accident, sometimes by design. Having once gained a foothold they are almost certain to be retained whenever the work is reprinted. Examples of this fact are abundant. Edition after edition of Dryden came out for more than a century full of alterations and errors. These in some cases perverted the meaning; yet it is only within a few years that the lines as written by him have anywhere been substituted for those remodelled by the blundering of type-setters and the sagacity of commentators. Even the text, current in an author's lifetime, cannot always be trusted implicitly. There are occasions when this resource fails us. A line in Byron's apostrophe to the ocean was printed wrong in the first place. Yet though he called attention to it at once, it was never corrected while he lived. It was not, indeed, till twenty years had gone by, after his own letter, pointing out the existence of the blunder, had been made accessible to the world in a published page, that the line was allowed to appear



as he wrote it ; and even now the original error is faithfully retained in most editions of his works.

Still, in the case of the modern author, there is rarely any difficulty in securing a correct reproduction of what he wrote, if the requisite labor is put forth. The instances to the contrary are very exceptional. If the editions published in his lifetime have passed under his own eye, the last one printed before his death may be fairly assumed under ordinary conditions to be the form which has commended itself to his final judgment. Beyond that there is no appeal. If the words do not make sense, if they violate grammar, he alone is responsible. The editor has no authority to meddle with the text ; he is abusing his privilege when he does it. He can suggest what seem to him improvements ; he can subjoin them ; but he cannot substitute them. He can censure, but he cannot change. The original text has an authority which cannot be gainsaid ; and alterations made in it, however plausible at first sight, almost invariably turn out on fuller knowledge to the disadvantage of the author's sense and to the necessary discredit of the commentator's power of perception.

Now there was not, and could not be, anything like this certainty in the case of a writer who flourished before the invention of printing. The difficulties that then stood in the way of absolute accuracy seem, at first view, almost insurmountable. There is, to begin with, the inevitable one that arises from the carelessness or oversight of the author himself. Omissions of words essential to the sense, inconsistencies of statement, errors of style, are far harder to detect on the written than on

the printed page. They are, doubtless, proportionately far harder now than they were then. The very difficulty of getting a correct copy at the hands of the scribe must have had a tendency to make the author in those days more observant about the character of his own original. Still, the difference would at any time have been in favor of the greater legibility of print over manuscript. Let it be assumed, however, that the latter has come in an absolutely correct state from the writer's hands. There was nothing to assure him that the most perfect text might not be imperfectly reproduced by the copyist, even by one working directly under his own eye. There was, indeed, a good deal to assure him that it would be; that it would undergo every sort of literary and linguistic mutilation that incompetence could suggest or indifference perpetrate. From possibilities of misfortune of this kind the author could never be wholly free. They must have lain heavy upon the heart of every great writer whose keen artistic sense made him solicitous about those trifles which, however unimportant in themselves, produce by their combination that beauty of expression the charm of which we feel even when we cannot explain. Of the truth of the fact itself we have had an exemplification in later days. Some of Milton's most famous sonnets were never published in his lifetime. They were not even printed until 1694, and then from copies which had been circulating from hand to hand in manuscript. It was not until 1753 that the text was published from the originals. These at once made it plain that the variations which had crept in were, with one possible exception, variations for the worse, and, in some instances, grossly for the worse.

Chaucer's address to his scrivener may be taken as furnishing of itself sufficient evidence of the danger that constantly threatened the text from carelessness. It shows that if the author prepared his matter with perfect accuracy, he could not be confident that this accuracy would be reproduced by the scribe. If such a result could not be obtained in the writer's own age, and while he was still living to correct the blunder and denounce the blunderer, we may be sure that there was still less prospect of any faultless exactness as time went on. The mistakes which haste or negligence made in one copy would be largely, if not entirely, reproduced in the transcripts that were made from it. Original errors would not only be perpetuated, but every scribe would be apt to add some contribution of his own to the common stock. Even when the sense was preserved with some degree of faithfulness, there could hardly fail to be more or less perversion of the words, and, in a rapidly changing language, mutilation of the grammatical endings; and these last two matters, while in prose of much importance, are in poetry of supreme importance.

But there was another source of danger to the text besides that springing from carelessness. This was the tendency to which the copyist could hardly fail at times to yield, to correct what was given him to reproduce. The scribe must have had something of the feelings of the commentator or the editor. He must have come to entertain a sort of responsibility for his author, and as he became more familiar with him, a kind of ownership of him, as if he had a right to do with him whatever seemed good in his eyes. It was therefore incum-

bent upon him to make him appear as presentable as possible, to put grammar in him wherever he had seemed to violate the laws of language, to put sense in him where he had apparently neglected to provide that commodity. Accordingly, the scribe would feel justified in making all necessary changes to secure these results. Such changes would, of course, largely arise from his own ignorance. It would be asking too much of human nature to expect him to concede that language, which was incomprehensible to him, was in itself comprehensible. He would naturally, therefore, set out to amend whatever he failed to understand. This, in turn, would strengthen the lurking disposition to change the author's words where he did understand them, to improve them in what he deemed the interests of grammar, of literature, or of religion. This is a temptation that must at times have beset the virtue of the least self-sufficient of copyists. It is not until recently that any high standard of morality in this matter has begun to be common; that the necessity of reproducing what an author wrote in the very words he wrote has been felt to be one of the fundamental rules to be observed by an editor. The violation of it is one of the reasons why so many texts of great English classics are little to be trusted. One very notorious illustration exists in our literature. Alexander Chalmers, a man little above the grade of a bookseller's hack, in his edition of the 'British Essayists,' set out to correct their grammar in accordance with the latest requirements of that schoolmaster English whose professors are now found in every hamlet and cast a gloom over nearly every fireside. When Ad-



dison, for instance, wrote "have laughed to have seen," he turned the expression into "have laughed to see." No one with the least literary conscience would in these days have the impudence to make an alteration of this kind. What he could do would be to write an article or a book to show his own knowledge of good usage, and to show up Addison's ignorance of it.

Another peril of a similar kind, threatening the integrity of the text in the age of manuscript, could hardly be exemplified in the age of printing. This would be the attempt to improve what the author wrote, not in the interest of formal correctness of speech, but in that of good morals or religion. When the turn of a phrase could easily twist a sneer into a compliment, a covert attack into undisguised approval, the copyist might easily persuade himself that he was benefiting author, reader, and the world at large by making the desired change. The opportunity to do this, as well as the temptation, would naturally be greatest in times when the business of transcribing was largely carried on in the monasteries. It is not probable that alterations of this sort often gained admittance into the text; that they did sometimes is very certain. After the invention of printing the only peril of the kind that threatened the words or the meaning came from the censorship of the press. While this sometimes involved the suppression of the whole work, it had always a sort of compensation in the fact that whatever was done was done with the author's knowledge, if not with his consent.

It is not, however, always necessary to attribute changes in the text to the depravity of scribes. In



many instances, a far more plausible and satisfactory reason can be found. There are few popular authors who have flourished since the invention of printing whose works do not show in successive editions changes which consist not merely in the alteration of words and phrases, but also in the addition of whole passages, or less frequently in their omission. The influences which operate upon the modern writer were potent, if not just as potent, upon the ancient. This will often account for the difference of texts. The variations which exist are, in many cases, the variations which the author himself saw fit to introduce. That this was sometimes the fact, we know. Of 'Piers Plowman' three texts exist. They are made so distinct by alterations and additions that the accomplished editor of the poem has had little difficulty in tracing existing manuscripts to three different editions, brought out at three different periods. When these variations exist on a small scale, however, the points involved are by no means so easy to settle. In the case of the modern author, the date on the title-page of the book tells us when the changes were made; in the case of the ancient one we have no way to ascertain, authoritatively, what is to be regarded as the latest revision. It becomes, in fact, largely a question of taste. For the purposes of this discussion, it is enough to show that such differences could and did spring from such a cause.

It follows from these various considerations that under ordinary conditions the earlier the manuscript the better is its text—better not for being a bibliographical curiosity, as is often the case with the printed book, but for being a final authority. It would be freer from cor-

ruptions that would be foisted in designedly, or mistakes that would creep in accidentally. To a text copied during the time in which the writer was living there would be due something of the respect now usually accorded to one so printed; it could not, of course, attain to the authority of the latter, unless there were actual evidence that it had been submitted to the writer's own inspection. But during the existence of the age of manuscript, it is the heavy price that a great poet pays for his popularity that few of these earliest texts endure for any long period. The man whose productions are sanctified by dulness may have a reasonable expectation that the copy furnished by himself will be the very one likely to survive, if the work survives at all. Not so with the author who has the fortune or misfortune to be interesting to his contemporaries. His manuscripts are read and studied. They are liable to be worn out with constant use. Upon their life, frequency of perusal has an effect even more deleterious than it has upon the life of a book. The result is that those produced first are generally the first to disappear. Those which take their place, owing to the agencies that have been described, will usually be of an inferior character. This is, to be sure, a matter in which no hard and fast rule can be laid down. A late transcript, made by a careful and competent scribe from a good manuscript, may be far superior to one produced in the author's lifetime by an incompetent hand. Besides this, certain other chances always existed. There are men to be found to whom inaccuracy is more hateful than crime. By a copyist of this character, no labor would be spared to ascer-

tain the text with exactness, and to set it forth in its integrity. There are, moreover, those whose admiration for what is written passes on in time to love for the writer; and a zeal, such as no money could buy, for the perfection of the one is enkindled by the devotion which the other has inspired. To causes like these it might happen that a very late manuscript would be far superior to an early one. Still, the general position cannot be gainsaid that the reverse is usually true; that the nearer the text is to the time wherein the author lived, the greater likelihood there is that it will be satisfactory.

A history of the transmission of the writings which were produced before the invention of printing would, doubtless, establish satisfactorily the truth of these general statements. Certain it is, that when we come to apply them to the particular case of Chaucer, it will be found that they are all borne out by the facts. The influences affecting the text, that have been at work elsewhere, have also been at work here. The dangers which have been pointed out as likely to beset it are the very dangers to which it has actually been exposed in his case. The variations which exist in it are, in some instances, surely due to the poet and not to the transcriber. These, however, are not numerous. Not so with the alterations for which copyists are responsible. Carelessness of transcription has destroyed the meaning of his verse, and more often impaired its beauty. Changes have been made in what he wrote in the supposed interests of good sense, or of good morals. Errors have crept in through pure stupidity, the one agency that never tires and never sleeps. The results of all these influences will be seen

when we come to examine the operation of each in detail.

Of all of Chaucer's admittedly genuine writings there still exist authentic manuscripts; in the case of some of them very many manuscripts. Of his greatest work, the 'Canterbury Tales,' about fifty have been described. Of the other poems the manuscripts which have come down are invariably scarcer. Of none of them are more than a dozen complete copies in existence. In most instances they fall below this number. Of some of them, especially of the 'Death of Blanche,' and of the 'House of Fame,' the original texts are very few, nor even is any one of these few very satisfactory. In general, it may be said of the manuscripts that they are of varying degrees of merit, from those possessing high excellence, to those that are worth consulting only for the illustration they furnish of the helpless imbecility with which work of this kind was sometimes done.

Had we a manuscript in Chaucer's own handwriting, or even one which could be proved to have passed under his supervision, that would necessarily be for us a final authority. We might dislike its readings, but we should respect them. We might suggest amendments—there is nothing to which the courage of the editor is not equal—but we should not insist upon them. No resource of this kind, however, is open to us. There is, probably, not a single manuscript of any of Chaucer's poems that goes back to his lifetime. Most of them belong to a period between twenty and fifty years after his death. Some of the manuscripts of the prose writings are perhaps nearer the period in which he flourished,



and in one or two instances may possibly be included in it. The contents of these were not so interesting, and they were, therefore, less liable to undergo the destruction that results from frequent use. A few also of the poetical manuscripts pretty certainly belong to a very early part of the fifteenth century. The so-called Campsall text, for instance, of the 'Troilus and Cressida,' was copied for Henry V. while Prince of Wales, and must therefore have been produced before the year 1413. But it is rarely that a date so early as this can be absolutely established. The one thing that can be stated with reasonable certainty about all these poetical manuscripts is, that none of them ever met the eye of the man whose words they record.

It results from this condition of things that the following assertions can be safely made. There is not a single manuscript of any of Chaucer's writings that can be looked upon as an indisputable final authority upon any disputed point. There is not a single one of them, no matter how great its general excellence, which does not contain readings that could plainly never have come from the poet himself. There is not a single one that does not at times make bad sense or even nonsense. There is not a single one of them in which lines do not occur so rough and inharmonious that it is simply inconceivable that, as they appear, they could ever have been the production of so great a master of melodious versification as was Chaucer.

In the case of manuscripts of inferior character, the errors in them that have sprung from lack of care, or lack of comprehension, are sometimes grotesque in their



absurdity. In one, in the description of the general mourning that follows the death of Arcite in the Knight's tale, "scratching of cheeks" is replaced by "scratching of chickens."<sup>1</sup> As curious a reading occurs in another in the Clerk of Oxford's tale. In that story, the birth of a son to the lord of the land is represented as bringing joy not only to the father, but to his subjects. As it is said in the poem,

"Not only he, but all his country merry  
Was for the child, and God they thank and hery."

They "hery"—that is, they "praise." So Chaucer wrote it. But in the manuscript referred to the second line reads to the effect that God they thanked, "for he was hairy."<sup>2</sup> So in a similar way, in the description of the monk which is contained in the prologue to the 'Canterbury Tales,' one text—the Cambridge—represents him as fastening his hood not under his chin, but under his shin.

Vagaries of this sort are usually confined to individual manuscripts, and ordinarily, too, to those of poor character. Still, there are cases in which all manuscripts, good and bad, agree in readings that are so manifestly wrong, and in some instances so monstrous, that it is equally puzzling to determine how such absurdities ever happened to get into the text at all, or how, after getting in, they managed to be retained. In the 'Book of the Duchess,' for illustration, the hero is expressing his grief at the death of his mistress. He complains that in consequence of it every kind of happiness he

<sup>1</sup> Furnivall, *Temporary Preface to Six-Text edition*, p. 17.

<sup>2</sup> London *Athenæum*, Aug. 28, 1869, p. 275.

once enjoyed has been turned into its opposite. The passage begins in this way :

“ For I am sorrow, and sorrow is I.  
 Alas ! and I will tell thee why.  
 My sorrow is turnèd into plaini<sup>g</sup>,<sup>1</sup>  
 And all my laughter to weepi<sup>g</sup>.”<sup>2</sup>

So it reads in the two manuscripts that have been preserved, and in the first printed editions which, doubtless, represented a manuscript no longer existing. Yet the third line of the passage quoted makes nonsense. The hero's sorrow has been turned into sorrow. Modern texts usually substitute for “sorrow” the word “joy.” If this be not the correct term, it certainly furnishes the correct sense ; yet for its employment there is not the slightest authority in anything that has come down to us.

But the most signal example of this blundering perversion of the text is to be found in the ‘Parliament of Fowls.’ The fifty-first stanza of that poem reads in all modern editions as follows :

“ The sparrow, Venus’ son ; the nightingale,  
 That clepeth forth the greenè leavès new ;  
 The swallow, murderer of the bēès smale,  
 That maken honey of flowers fresh of hue ;  
 The wedded turtle with her heartè true ;  
 The peacock with his angel’s feathers bright ;  
 The pheasant, scorner of the cock by night.”

Fourteen manuscripts or parts of manuscripts—assuming Caxton’s edition to represent one—have been printed of this poem, of which thirteen contain the verse just given.

<sup>1</sup> Mourning.

<sup>2</sup> Lines 597-600.

Some of them are of special excellence. Yet not a single one of them has *bees* in the third line. That word, which is now invariably employed, cannot be found in this place before the edition of 1561. For it eleven of the manuscripts read *fowles*, or *foules*, and one the equivalent *briddes*. A solitary one of the thirteen has *flyes*. This was also the word which appeared in the folio of 1532 and those that followed it, until the folio of 1561, when *bees* was substituted in its place. There can be scarcely any doubt that *flyes* was what Chaucer wrote. Not merely is it the only word he could have used that has any authority in its favor, but he himself lets us know that under that designation *bees* were at that time included. "These flies," he says in the Parson's tale, "that men clepeth bees, when they maken hir king, they chesen one that hath no prick, wherewith he may sting." Similarly in his version of Boethius he translated the *apium . . . volantum* found in the seventh meter of the third book by "these flying flies that we clepen been." It was the blunder of some scribe to convert the original *flyes* of the stanza just quoted into *foules*. In this he was religiously followed by almost all who thereafter undertook to reproduce the poem. This one instance furnishes satisfactory evidence of the little intelligence and critical discernment which, as a general rule, were brought to bear upon the task of transcription. Surprising as it is that an error so gross should have been made, it is far more surprising that it could have been persistently maintained in so many manuscripts often differing widely from one another, and some unquestionably the work of competent copyists. To represent the swallows as

feeding upon birds was bad enough ; but when, in addition, these same birds were described as making honey, it seems to have required unusual incapacity to miss substituting a proper word, even though no written authority for it could be found.

Mistakes in individual words, it might naturally be expected, would be most numerous in the case of proper names. Such is the fact. The copyist who had no knowledge of the person mentioned—and he must often have been without this knowledge—would not have the slightest help from the context in deciphering any obscurity in the handwriting. When, therefore, he came to a proper name not plainly written, his only resource would be to guess at what it must be ; and his guesses would often leave the original in a form that defied recognition and baffled conjecture. They appear, as a matter of fact, in every shape that misapprehension could devise or ignorance suggest. In some cases, perhaps in most, one manuscript enables us to correct the error found in another. It is often through this agency only that we can be sure that it is an error, at least an error of the scribe. Here, as in more important matters, it is the multitude of texts that brings safety. Theseus, for illustration, appears for Tydeus in one manuscript of ‘Anelida and Arcite.’ Eight other manuscripts render it a matter of ease to rectify a blunder palpable when seen, but not certainly seen to be a blunder, so long as the copy of the poem containing it is alone consulted. In other cases the context, referring, as it does, to some well-known fact or legend, makes it possible for us to substitute the proper word, even were there no correct texts

existing. Thus in 'Troilus and Cressida,' Tantalus gives place in some of the manuscripts to such forms as Mantelus or Mancalus. But in many cases there is no help of any kind to which we can have recourse. The consequence is, that Chaucer's writings furnish us with a number of names of persons which no dictionary or cyclopædia has gathered into its pages, and which in some cases no author besides himself is known to have mentioned. For some of these the poet is plainly responsible. No one knows whether they are the pure coinages of his own brain, or derived by him from a source that has temporarily disappeared, or has actually perished. The famous *crux*, the god Eclympasteyre, who in the 'Death of Blanche' is spoken of as the heir of Morpheus,<sup>1</sup> is a case in point. It is made no clearer by its occurring also in Froissart, as the French writer seems to have borrowed it from the English one.<sup>2</sup> In other instances it is impossible to determine whether we have to thank Chaucer or the transcriber for the name. In the 'House of Fame,' as a single illustration, the poet mentions, among the minstrels that he saw, two persons who are put down in the manuscripts as Atiteris and Pseustis of Athens. The early printed editions furnish, instead of these, the names of Citherus and Procerus. Not one of the four is known.

In the case of contemporaries, it might well happen that a proper name could baffle without blame the in-

<sup>1</sup> "There the goddès lay asleep,  
Morpheus and Eclympasteyre,  
That was the god of sleepès heir."

—*Death of Blanche*, 165-8.

<sup>2</sup> Sandras, *Étude sur Chaucer*, p. 295.



genuity of the scribe to decipher and reproduce accurately; but no excuse could satisfactorily avail him in the case of men whose fame has been handed down from antiquity. Yet, here again, for some of these peculiar forms the copyist can no more be held responsible than can the type-setter for some of the verbal vagaries of the modern author. The poet himself must bear a part of the censure, if censure is to be bestowed, for the shape the proper names assume which he has occasion to employ. He either found them in the form in which he used them, or purposely changed them to suit the convenience of his measure or his sense of euphony. This belief in an intentional alteration was the one generally accepted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Speght, in the address to the reader prefixed to his edition, gave direct expression to this view. Milton also adopted it. In his 'Animadversions upon the Remonstrants Defence against Smectymnuus,' he upheld the practice of modifying outlandish foreign words, and inveighed against the servility of screwing the English mouth to a harsh foreign termination. Modern methods of exact transliteration would certainly have seemed to him pedantry of the most pronounced type. In support of his view, he adduced, in particular, the authority of the ancient poet. "Our learned Chaucer," he wrote, "did not stick to do so, writing Semyramis for Semiramis, Amphiorax for Amphiaraus, K. Sejes for K. Ceyx, the husband of Alcyone, with many other names strangely metamorphosed from the true orthography, if he had made any account of that in these kind of words." True as this fact may have been in some cases, there is little

reason to doubt that in others the peculiar form which appears was due to a mistake on the part of the poet. The means of verification in matters of doubt hardly existed then at all. Even two hundred years later, when the art of printing had made it possible to ascertain with exactness the precise form of words, Spenser contributed to the world some names of ancient persons and places which never had the fortune to be known to the ancients themselves.

The illustrations which have been given are specimens of the more outrageous sort of blunders that turn up at times in the manuscripts. The existence of such a one as that found in most extant texts of the 'Parliament of Fowls' is sufficient of itself to overthrow any theory which should insist upon the absolute verbal authority of some particular copy. Yet these errors are, after all, exceptional. In texts of the best class they are so few that they are hardly worthy of serious consideration. But to imperfections of another kind all manuscripts, even those of the highest excellence, are largely subject. These are the mistakes, usually of slight importance in themselves, that arise from haste, or from that inevitable lapse of attention from which the most careful of us can never be absolutely free. They may be classed under the following heads: First, an inferior word, which makes sense of a certain sort, is substituted for one closely resembling it, which makes the exact sense. Secondly, the sense is maintained, but the metre is destroyed by the dropping of words, or the adding of words, or the inversion of the order of words. The most common illustration of this class of errors is the

omission of *that* from the lines to which it belongs, and its insertion in lines to which it does not belong. It was at one time very frequently added to the relative *which* and to certain of the conjunctions, making in consequence combinations such as *which that, if that, though that, when that*, and several others. Even now these can scarcely be said to have died out entirely. In Chaucer's time usage was variable. The addition or rejection accordingly of this single word will, in numerous cases, turn a halting or heavy verse into one in which the melody is perfect.

The change of place in the order of words is another frequent error in the manuscripts, though not so common as their addition or omission. All these defects, however, occasionally show themselves on a large scale. Whole lines sometimes appear out of their proper order. More than that, they disappear entirely without leaving behind any indication of a gap in the manuscript. The fact that they must have once existed we should often know, even had we been left in the possession of but a single text. The loss of a line would be indicated by the lack of the corresponding ryme. Entire passages, besides, are occasionally transposed or omitted altogether. In the latter case, however, where the sense is not affected, it is fair to assume that the difference of text may be due to the act of the author, not to the carelessness of the scribe. In going over his work he has inserted or struck out something. His later version will, of course, be followed by all copyists who have it in their possession, while the original form may continue to be repeated by other copyists who have had no ac-

cess to the revision. It is certainly impossible to attribute the origin of all these variations to the scribes. At this point of time we cannot always tell which version in any given case represents the latest decision of the poet; we can only judge which is the preferable one on general principles of effectiveness or taste. Unfortunately, in the application of these there is apt to be displayed a wide difference of opinion. One illustration of this variation of text can be found in the Prologue to the 'Canterbury Tales,' in the account given of the "limitour," or begging friar. The poet is describing the great efficiency displayed by this particular person in securing contributions to his order. In Tyrwhitt's text as well as in the early editions, the lines read as follows:

"He was the bestè beggar in his house;  
And gave a certain farmè for the graunt,  
None of his brethren camen in his haunt;  
For though a widow haddè but a shoe,  
So pleasant was his *In principio*,  
Yet would he have a farthing ere he went."

Most manuscripts omit the second and third lines of this extract. These describe a transaction the account of which may have been added by another hand. It seems the more reasonable conclusion, however, that they were the production of the poet himself, and were struck out on revision, because they interfered with the continuity of the thought. An instance can be given more striking. In three manuscripts, certainly, of the 'Canterbury Tales,' the one hundred and thirty-six lines that end the Summoner's tale are omitted, and their place is taken by a



feeble ending of four lines that follow after the four hundred and fifty-sixth line. This is cited by Tyrwhitt as an illustration of the liberties taken by some copyists with the author. His view is probably correct. Yet it is by no means certain that the incompleteness of the text in this instance was due to the negligence of the scribes, or to their presumption. The tale can end as it is ended before these four concluding lines are reached. The termination would be a poor one unquestionably, but still it would be a termination. It is not hard to conceive that this is the way in which it was originally sent out by the poet, and that the subsequent addition of the one hundred and thirty-six lines, now forming the conclusion, may have failed to reach some copyists.

At any rate, that changes of this character took place at times on no slight scale we know from incontestable evidence. To the 'Legend of Good Women' there are two prologues, differing very materially. One of these exists in only a single manuscript. This was first brought to notice by the late Mr. Bradshaw, librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge, who printed it in 1864. Its variations from the ordinary form of the prologue are remarkable, not only for their number, but for their importance. Long passages are found in it which are not contained in the other; while it, in turn, lacks passages which the other contains. The places of passages also frequently undergo transposition. This is evidence that cannot be set aside. It may fairly be held to justify the assumption that much of the difference of manuscripts is the work of the author himself.

No such charitable view can be taken of the corrup-



tions we now come to consider. They are due to the transcriber and to him alone. They are, moreover, far more numerous than all the other alterations of the text combined. They consist not of changes in the words, but of changes in the form of words. This kind of corruption had its origin in the linguistic movement that was then steadily going on. In the century that followed Chaucer's death, the English speech was rapidly sloughing off or confounding the few grammatical endings that literature had not established itself early enough to save. It was inevitable that careless copyists, and occasionally careful ones, should neglect or forget to add terminations which had ordinarily ceased to be used, and the force of which, when used, was no longer felt. The final *e*, in particular, was disappearing from pronunciation, and those were the days in which difference of pronunciation was denoted by difference of spelling. The dropping of this one vowel was a main cause of the ruin that overtook the metre. The forgetfulness of the fact that it had once been sounded was the chief reason why for so long a period the measure failed to be restored.

But the final *e*, though the principal, was far from being the only grammatical characteristic that suffered at the hands of the scribe. One of these is well worth noting for itself, as well as for the light it throws upon this very matter. A special peculiarity of the earliest English was the difference of vowel that existed between the singular and the plural of the preterite of most of the so-called strong verbs—an example of which is still preserved in the *was* and *were* of the substantive verb.

This well-defined and marked characteristic of the original tongue survived for a while the break-up that followed the Norman conquest. In the case of individual words it held its ground tenaciously for centuries afterwards. The purists of those times, if such there were, would have insisted strongly, for instance, upon saying *I sang* and *we sunge*, *I rod(e)* and *we riden*, and would have earnestly maintained that the language was going to rack and ruin because men were found careless enough or ignorant enough to say *I sung* or *we rode*. This distinction of usage in the case of certain words lasted down to Chaucer's time. An excellent example is furnished by the preterite of *gin*. This at that time occupied the place of the modern *did* with the infinitive to indicate the past tense. "He gan walk," for illustration, meant "he walked." In the case of this preterite, the practice of the earlier speech was generally observed. When the subject was singular, *gan* was employed; when the subject was plural, *gunne(n)*, or, as it was often written, *gonne(n)*. So regularly does the metre require the monosyllabic form in the one case, and the dissyllabic in the other, that there can be no question that it was Chaucer's usual, perhaps uniform, custom to vary the vowel of this particular preterite. Yet with him this was but one of a very few survivals of what had at one time been a characteristic that belonged to the inflection of a large number of verbs. But when in the fifteenth century the terminations of the preterite plural disappeared, it was unreasonable to expect that men would long continue to keep up a distinction which with them had ceased to mean anything; that they

would go on carefully saying *I began*, and *we begun*, *I rod(e)* and *we rid*, simply because their fathers had apparently done so for reasons which they had no means of comprehending. Such a practice, unless based upon and buttressed by an established literature, was sure to break down from its own weight and uselessness. As no established literature then existed, it did break down. The scribes could not be expected to maintain forever a distinction of which they had no conception. The result is that in many of the manuscripts of Chaucer *gan* appears where both metre and grammar demand *gunne*; and a similar statement may be made of two or three other preterites.

The discarding of grammatical endings, and the confounding of grammatical inflections, would therefore be special dangers that would threaten the purity of Chaucer's text during the continuance of the age of manuscript. They would naturally increase, as time went on, and as the memory of the older forms became weaker and weaker with the users of the later speech. The effect of them is seen, indeed, in some manuscripts on the most extensive scale. Still, the injury wrought by their agency was confined mainly to the versification; it was comparatively seldom that the sense was destroyed. Not so with the changes that sprang not from ignorance but from design, though in some cases the design would itself necessarily spring from ignorance. The scribe came across some word that he did not know, or some line that he failed to understand. If of an enterprising spirit, he would not be content to follow his copy, which, in many instances, must have been little

deserving of respect. He would correct; and his corrections, sometimes happy without doubt, would more often exhibit the density of his own misinformation. In 'Troilus and Cressida,' Phlegethon, spoken of as "the fiery flood of hell," appears in one of the manuscripts as "the fiery *fiend* of hell." In all probability the copyist who made the change congratulated himself upon his critical sagacity in discovering a gross error, into which previous transcribers had fallen. There are other places where the text must have puzzled the whole generation of scribes, and is often none too certain now. Thus in 'Anelida and Arcite' it is said of a lover who is treated with disdain by his mistress, and receives from her no favors,

" Thus serveth he withouten meat or sip,"

that is, as it is generally explained, without food or drink. So the line appears in the printed copies; but in the extant manuscripts in which it is found it reads variously "without meat or sheep," "without fee or ship," and "without fee or sheep." Our only authority for the received reading is that it so occurs in the version published by Caxton. From this later editions seem to have derived it. With our present knowledge, its correctness can hardly be gainsaid. Yet the variations show plainly that the copyists were puzzled by the expression, that the employment of *sip* in the sense of "drink" was unusual at the time, or at least struck them as strange; and that, in consequence, there was an effort on their part to put sense in a line out of which they had been unable to extract any. They can scarcely be congratulated upon their success. "Without fee or



sheep" meant little, "without fee or ship" meant less, "without meat or sheep" meant nothing.

Outside of these unavailing struggles of the transcribers with matters they did not understand, they must have been subject at times to the temptations which beset the modern editor. Attention has been called to the fact that the text of every great author is always in peril from three classes of foes. There is the man who wants to reform it in the interest of what he calls good grammar; the man who wants to reform it in the interest of what he deems good literature; and the man who wants to reform it in the interest of what he knows to be good morals. We have no means of saying how much the writings of Chaucer may have been mutilated for the sake of furnishing a better grammatical, literary, and religious example, for we are not and cannot be sure of the precise form in which they came from his hands. Still, it is hopeless to expect that he has not suffered somewhat from these agencies, though from the multitude of texts, perhaps, not without remedy. It is only in rare cases that alterations, designedly made, can be pointed out with certainty. In the 'Death of Blanche,' a short song, called a complaint, is introduced near the middle of the poem.<sup>1</sup> In the manuscript from which the sixteenth-century edition was printed, or in the edition itself, a line was inserted in this little piece, and the verses rearranged throughout, so as to make its rhyme correspond with that found in the rest of the composition. This was manifestly the work of an improver, who was so anxious for formal correctness

<sup>1</sup> Lines 475—85.



that, as is usual in such cases, he paid no attention to sense.

There is, moreover, one very striking illustration of a change of text made in the interests of a religious order, and made at a very early date. It is found in the famous passage at the opening of the Wife of Bath's tale, which describes the disappearance of the fairies from Britain in consequence of the appearance of the friars. To understand the character of the alteration, it will be necessary to quote the whole of the paragraph, at the end of which it occurs; but the poetry is worth all the possible space it can take. These are the lines:

“ In the oldè dayes of the king Arthóur,  
 Of which that Britons spoken great honóur,  
 All was this land fulfilled of fáëry.  
 The elf-queen with her jolly company  
 Dancèd full oft on many a greenè mead.  
 This was the old opinion, as I read—  
 I speak of many hundred years ago—  
 But now can no man see none elvès mo:  
 For now the greatè charity and prayérès  
 Of limitóurs<sup>1</sup> and other holy frerès,  
 That searchen every land and every stream,  
 As thick as motès in the sunnè beam,  
 Blessing hallès, chambers, kitchenès, bowers,  
 Cities, burghès, castles, highè towers,  
 Thorpès,<sup>2</sup> barnès, shipnès,<sup>3</sup> dairiés,  
 This maketh that there be no fáëries;  
 For there as wont to walken was an elf,  
 There walketh now the limitour himself,

<sup>1</sup> Begging friars.

<sup>2</sup> Villages.

<sup>3</sup> Sheds, stables.

In undermelès<sup>1</sup> and in morwenínges,<sup>2</sup>  
 And saith his matins and his holy thingès  
 As he goeth in his limitatió.<sup>3</sup>  
 Women may now go safely up and down,  
 In every bush and under every tree;  
 There is none other incubus but he,  
 And he ne will don hem but dishonour."

The sting of this covert attack upon the friars lies in the last line. It is eminently characteristic of the poet's manner, and is in thorough keeping with the feelings and opinions of the speaker to whom it is attributed. The *ne . . . but* has the force of "only." The dishonor of a woman is, in the eyes of the Wife of Bath, to be reckoned not as a crime, but as a peccadillo; and she was merely giving utterance to an almost universal sentiment of the time when she represented the friars as specially addicted to licentiousness. Yet, in a few of the manuscripts,<sup>4</sup> including the Harleian, the last line reads as follows:

"And he will don hem no dishonour."

The character of the friar is saved by the alteration, but that of the poet is not helped. The conclusion is made tame and utterly pointless. We can be confident that it is a conclusion which expressed neither the views of the Wife of Bath nor those of Chaucer. Yet this spiritless ending is found in all the printed editions late or early. Fortunately, the best manuscripts enable us to restore the genuine reading. It is easy to see how the change could have come about. In an age when

<sup>1</sup> Afternoons.

<sup>2</sup> Mornings.

<sup>3</sup> District assigned to a begging friar.

<sup>4</sup> The Cambridge MS., among the six texts, is the only one in which *no* takes the place of *but*.

the business of transcribing texts was mainly carried on in the monasteries, it was no difficult matter for a copyist to persuade himself that he was doing the Lord a service when he converted an attack upon a religious body into a commendation of it, by an expedient so simple as the substitution of a *no* for a *but*.

Such were the perils to which the text of Chaucer stood exposed during the age of manuscript. They were, assuredly, numerous enough to be a perpetual menace to its integrity; they were serious enough, if they actually had done the harm they threatened, to impair it utterly. The instances which have been already cited might fairly seem to give the impression that the outlook for any satisfactory edition of the poet was gloomy. As a matter of fact, the reverse is true, at least in the case of most of his writings. The text of Chaucer, if even the worst view be taken of it, is in a reasonably fair state. The rapid progress that is fast being made in the knowledge of the speech and the life of the period will, at no distant date, put it in a position of almost absolute trustworthiness. Even now, it is safe to say that it is in a much better condition than that of Shakspeare, though this is partly due to the fact that it has never been subjected to a violent and protracted strain of perverse human ingenuity. There are several reasons for this state of things. Two only need be mentioned here, for two only have had any marked influence in bringing about the result. The first is the character of the errors. The manuscripts that have survived have, it is true, many variations; but the variations are within well-defined limits, and, however great in number, are

generally of small importance. They are mainly variations in the spelling, and more particularly in the forms assumed by the grammatical endings. The verbal differences, as has already been pointed out, consist largely in the addition or omission of certain well-known words which affect the metre and not the meaning, or in the inversion of the order of words in the line. These are matters in which it is always easy to find precisely where the difficulty lies, and to correct it after it is found. The student who has become so steeped in Chaucer's language, so saturated, if the phrase can be permitted, with his poetry, that the forms of his grammar, his modes of expression, his peculiarities of diction have got to be a part of his own mental equipment, could, with one of the worst of texts, reproduce in the large majority of instances, the lines as they appeared originally, so far as measure and phraseology and grammatical terminology are concerned. Corruptions which destroy the sense it might be entirely out of his power to remedy; but these are but a small proportion of the whole number.

Fortunately, we have a surer resource than the highest scholarship could supply, even were it coupled with the most intimate acquaintance with Chaucer's writings. Many manuscripts have survived the wreck and ruin wrought by the centuries that have gone by since his death. Better still, some of these have clearly been the work of men who sought with loving care to secure and perpetuate a trustworthy text of the genius they admired. It is to the patient labor of these often unknown and, probably, never much regarded scribes, that we owe



the preservation in their purity of writings which mere hirelings would have left in hopeless confusion. But, after all, it is not in any one text, but in the number of texts, that safety lies. It is by the comparison of many manuscripts that the errors of any particular one are brought to light. It is this same comparison that makes painfully clear the vanity of conjectural emendation. Readings which human ingenuity could hardly have hit upon show what the line must originally have been, and how hopeless would have been the effort to ascertain it had we been left in the possession of but a single text. Even where guesses at the right reading could have been made with some show of success, they could never have furnished that degree of assurance which even an inferior manuscript would impart. Here is an illustration from the 'Legend of Good Women,' where the context might suggest to a trained scholar the probable words :

" Give him to drink when he goeth to his rest,  
And he shall sleep as long as ever thee lest,<sup>1</sup>  
The Martotikes and Epies ben so stronge."

The last line is printed precisely as it appears in two or three manuscripts. If these were all we had, its emendation would, doubtless, be a task accomplished some time ; but every difficulty disappears at once the moment we find in the other manuscripts this reading :

"The narcotiks and opies<sup>2</sup> ben so strong."

Again, in this poem there is a passage which describes

<sup>1</sup> It pleases thee.

<sup>2</sup> Opiates.

the helpless position of Lucrece, when assaulted by Sextus Tarquinius. In it occurs a comparison which appears in nearly half the texts as follows:

“Right as a wolf that fayneth a love allone,  
To whom shall she compleyne or make mone?”

Absurd manifestly as is this reading, there would probably be an effort on the part of some to attach to it some kind of sense, were it the only form of the couplet that had been handed down. The remaining manuscripts settle the question decisively and easily. In them the first line runs as follows:

“Right as a wolf that fynt<sup>1</sup> a lambe allone.”

A still more marked case of the ease with which comparison solves problems that would perplex and puzzle all students, though the solution lies possibly within the power of conjecture, can be found in the prologue to this same poem. Alcestis, addressing the God of Love in behalf of the accused Chaucer, says, as it appears in one manuscript:

“I, your Alceste, whylome quene of Trace,  
Chast ye this man thi right of your grace,  
That ye hym never hurt in alle his live.”

Nothing but the luckiest of guesses could, unaided, restore the second line to comprehensibility. No alteration of it could be devised that would be accepted by all as satisfactory. The aid of the other manuscripts presents it plainly in its correct form,

“I aske you, this man, right of your grace.”

<sup>1</sup> Findeth.

Instances of this kind could be multiplied largely. Curiously enough, however, the exact text of Chaucer came near being destroyed by the agency which has come to be the best safeguard of all texts. This was the art of printing. The introduction of that invention involved the destruction of manuscripts. The written work, after having been put in type, would seem to lose at once any special worth of its own, if, indeed, it were not defaced beyond recognition in the process. But depreciation of value would not stop at this point, or with the single copy printed. The wide diffusion of a text both cheaper and clearer than anything that existed in handwriting would, in an uncritical age, speedily render of little account all copies of it in the form of manuscript. The only apparent claim to estimation these would possess would be that they contained something which could not be found in much better shape elsewhere. This claim would be rendered nugatory the moment one of them was printed. Accordingly, they would be neglected, would be forgotten, and in process of time would come to be destroyed. However numerous may be the copies of Chaucer's writings that have been saved, we may rest assured that they are vastly outnumbered by those that have been lost. In the case of two of his poems, the scarcity of original authorities is very marked. Of the 'Death of Blanche,' there are but two manuscripts known to be extant, and of the 'House of Fame' but three. None of these are of the first quality. The result is that the text of neither of these poems is in a perfectly satisfactory condition. This is particularly true of the latter. In consequence, while it

is one of the most interesting of Chaucer's productions, it presents difficulties of construction and of sense that, with our present resources, are, perhaps, incapable of ever being fully settled.

With the introduction of printing, the history of the text of Chaucer enters upon an entirely new phase. The works of the poet were naturally among the first things that engaged the attention of the men who had brought into England the practice of the new art. Caxton was his great admirer, and an edition of the 'Canterbury Tales' was a production that came early from his press. It is not dated, but is thought to have been printed about 1478. The manuscript, however, from which it was set up was a wretched one, and six years later Caxton brought out a second edition from another manuscript. His reason for doing this is worth noting, because it shows there must have been at the time a body of students who recognized the existence of corruptions in the copies, and were laudably interested in preserving the text of the poet in its purity. These men found a congenial spirit in the old printer, who was willing to go to a good deal of trouble and expense "for to satisfy the author," as he somewhat quaintly puts it. He tells us the story himself in his preface to the second edition. "Which book," he writes, "I have diligently overseen, and duly examined to the end that it be made according unto his own making; for I find many of the said books, which writers have abridged it, and many things left out, and in some places have set certain verses that he never made ne set in his book; of which books so incorrect was one brought to me six years passed,

which I supposed had been very true and correct, and according to the same I did do emprint a certain number of them, which anon were sold to many and diverse gentlemen, of whom one gentleman came to me, and said that this book was not according in many places unto the book that Geoffrey Chaucer had made. To whom I answered that I had made it according to my copy, and by me was nothing added ne minished. Then he said, he knew a book which his father had and much loved, that was very true, and according unto his own first book by him made; and said more, if I would emprint it again, he would get me the same book for a copy. Howbeit he wist well that his father would not gladly depart from it. To whom I said, in case he could get me such a book, true and correct, yet I would once endeavor me to emprint it again, for to satisfy the author, whereas tofore by ignorance I erred in hurting and defaming his book in divers places, in setting in some things that he never said he made, and leaving out many things that he made, which be requisite to be set in it. And thus we fell at accord, and he full gently gat of his father the said book, and delivered it to me, by which I have corrected my book."<sup>1</sup>

Of each of these two editions about nine copies are known to be still in existence.<sup>2</sup> The text that was found in the second was the one followed in the editions brought out by the printers who came immediately after, Wynkyn de Worde and Pynson. Caxton printed

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Tyrwhitt in the Appendix to the Preface to *Canterbury Tales*, vol. i., p. v., edition of

1798. I have modernized the spelling.

<sup>2</sup> Blades's *Caxton*, edition of 1877, pp. 192, 291.



besides some of the poet's minor works. Among these were notably the 'Parliament of Fowls,' 'Anelida and Arcite,' the 'House of Fame,' and 'Troilus and Cressida,' if it be right to include among minor works a production like the last, which contains five sixths as many lines as the *Æneid*. Still, he never made a complete collection of Chaucer's writings, and probably never intended it. It was Pynson who first began the process of bringing his poems together in one volume. This came out in the year 1526. It was, however, only a beginning; for the collection was by no means complete. Such as it was, moreover, it was divided into three parts. Each of these was an independent work, as each had a signature of its own, and was to be sold by itself; and while these parts could be bound together, the volume as a whole was not furnished with a general title.

The poems already mentioned, and a few still shorter, were the ones printed and reprinted during the early part of the sixteenth century. It was not, however, till 1532 that the attempt was made to include all of Chaucer's productions, whether in prose or verse, in one volume. This book was printed by Godfray, and was brought out under the editorial supervision of Francis Thynne, chief clerk of the kitchen to King Henry VIII. It is an edition of great importance. Its text remained for two centuries and a half the standard text of the 'Canterbury Tales.' For the remaining poems, it has been until a comparatively late period the best text, and as it was the one usually reprinted, it remained for the vast majority of readers the only accessible text.

To prepare and perfect the work, Thynne, we are in-

formed by his son, made extensive search for copies. With this object in view, he had obtained a "commission to search all the libraries of England for Chaucer's works, so that out of all the abbeyes of this realm (which reserved any monuments thereof), he was fully furnished with multitude of books; amongst which one copy of some part of his works came to his hands subscribed in divers places with *Examinatur Chaucer*."<sup>1</sup> This particular manuscript, which would be simply invaluable if found, has never been heard of save in the account here given. It seems improbable that it could have been among the twenty-five more or less imperfect which the younger Thynne inherited, but which he tells us were given away, or dispersed by neglect, or lost by theft.

This edition of 1532 contained a dedicatory epistle to King Henry VIII., purporting to come from its editor. It was not, however, the composition of Thynne, but of his friend, Sir Brian Tuke, and was the elevated, excellent, and polished preface<sup>2</sup> to the work that was commended by Leland. Tyrwhitt, with his usual sagacity, suspected that such was the case.<sup>3</sup> His conject-

<sup>1</sup> Thynne's *Animadversions*, etc., p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> See chapter ii., page 139.

<sup>3</sup> "I am much inclined to suspect . . . that the Preface of *Brianus Tucca* (Sir Brian Tuke) which he (i. e. Leland) commends so much, was nothing else but the Prefatory address, or Dedication, to the King, which is prefixed to Godfray's and other later editions in the name of Mr. William Thynne. . . . It is very probable, that the Dedication (which is in such a style as I think

very likely to be commended by Leland), though standing in the name of Mr. William Thynne, was composed for him by Sir Brian Tuke. Mr. Thynne himself, I apprehend, was rather a lover, than a master of these studies." These words appear in a note of Tyrwhitt to his Appendix to the Preface of his edition of the *Canterbury Tales*; and they furnish one of a large number of instances which might be cited of his extraordinary critical sagacity.

ure was proved true by a discovery of the late Henry Bradshaw. In a copy of this edition in the library of Clare Hall, Cambridge, he found written by Tuke, in his own hand, the following words: "This preface I, Sir Bryan Tuke, knight, wrote at the request of Mr. Clerk of the Kitchen, then being tarrying for the tide at Greenwich."<sup>1</sup> The epistle certainly sustains Leland's assertion that its author was wonderfully gifted in the use of the English tongue. It is little more than a jungle of sentences through which it requires a patient and practised student of language to make his way. Unfortunately, after he has succeeded, he is usually no better off than when he began. There are, however, scattered through it intelligible passages, one of which will be given. "Taking such delight and pleasure," says the writer, "in the works of this noble clerk, I have of a long season much used to read and visit the same, and as books of divers imprints came unto my hands, I easily and without great study might and have deprehended in them many errors, falsities and depravations, which evidently appeared by the contrarieties and alterations found by collation of the one with the other, whereby I was moved and stirred to make diligent search where I might find or recover any true copies or exemplaries of the said books, whereunto in process of time, not without cost and pain, I attained, and not only unto such as seem to be very true copies of those works of Geoffrey Chaucer, which before had been put in print, but also to divers others never till now imprinted, but remaining

<sup>1</sup> Thynne, *Animadversions*, etc.; *Hindwords*, by F. J. Furnivall, p. xxvi.

almost unknown and in oblivion." This is one of the shorter and clearer sentences of Tuke, who speaks, it is to be observed, in the character of William Thynne. It is of interest as being really an authoritative statement on the part of the latter as to what he had done, and as to the method he had taken to do it; and it confirms fully the account given by the son of the labor bestowed upon the work by the father.

Thynne's edition, like those which followed it, and were founded upon it, deserved even more than the title of complete which it claimed; for it assigned the poet a number of pieces he never wrote. In regard to the comparative merits of its text of the 'Canterbury Tales' and Caxton's, there are contrary opinions. Thynne's son, in his animadversions upon Speght's edition, stoutly stood up for the superiority of the former, and criticised the latter with some severity. It is in this way that he spoke of Caxton's second edition: "I know," he wrote, "notwithstanding his fair prologue of printing, that, by a true copy, there be many imperfections in that book." Furthermore, he asserted that it was because the previous edition had been imperfect and corrupt that his father was led to undertake the task of bringing out Chaucer's works in an augmented and correct form. His assertion on this point has been sustained by some modern scholars. On the other hand, this favorable opinion of Thynne's alterations and emendations was not shared by Tyrwhitt. He thought the previous text had received no advantage from the edition of 1532. "Its material variations," he wrote, "from Caxton's second edition are all, I think, for the worse." In support of



this view, he brought forward certain proofs to show the superiority of the latter. The truth in this case could not well be determined save by a careful comparison, which, if it has ever been made, has never been published, and which on this side of the ocean could not even be made.

Thynne's edition was reprinted in 1542, with the addition of the spurious 'Plowman's Tale.' After that the ordinary bibliographies represent it as reprinted in 1546 and in 1555. But there are no editions of these years, and those so considered are doubtless included in the undated edition, which was brought out probably near 1550, by four different publishers—William Bonham, Richard Kele, Robert Toy, and Thomas Petit—acting in conjunction. Each of these had his own name on the copies that belonged to his share. Besides the tale just mentioned, nothing was added to what had been contained in the original edition till 1561. In that year appeared a volume embracing the collected works of Chaucer. This is usually spoken of as having been edited by Stow. It seems rather to have been merely a publication of the booksellers, to which that antiquary was authorized to add productions of the poet that he found still unprinted. It did not differ, at least to any marked extent, from the preceding collections by changes made in the text; but the whole number of poems was a good deal augmented. The character of most of these additions, however, was not such as to inspire confidence in the intelligence or the taste of the man who had rescued them from the oblivion into which they had fallen. John Stow was, indeed, what our



fathers used to call a "painful antiquary." Unfortunately his judgment bore little proportion to his pains. Still, the pieces he added were received in his time as genuine without much question, and have in some instances come to play an important part in the biography and literary estimate of the poet. The consideration of these additions and their authenticity belongs, however, to another part of this work.

The next edition was that of 1598. It differed from all that had gone before in several particulars, especially in containing a life of the poet, an account of his writings, an argument prefixed to every piece, and a glossary of the obsolete words and significations. Thomas Speght is commonly spoken of as its editor. He has a right, after a fashion, to whatever distinction belongs to the title. Still, there is no reason to doubt that the use of his services was an after-thought, and that the work was originally intended to be nothing more than a bookseller's reprint of the previous edition. That Stow was also consulted in its preparation is unquestionable. That he contributed a good deal to it we know from his own testimony. At the outset, certainly, Speght had nothing to do with the edition that now goes under his name; at least he had not, if his own assertions are to be credited. Three parts of the volume—by which he doubtless means three fourths—he tells us had already been printed before he was called upon to render any assistance. His name had been suggested to the booksellers by the nature of his studies. For many years he had been collecting materials for the explanation and illustration of Chaucer's writings. He had kept

in view several objects. Of these the most important were the reformation of the text by written copies, the explanation of obsolete words and obscure passages, an account of the poet's life, and the addition to the body of his works of some pieces that had never yet been put in print. The result of his investigations he had communicated to private friends; he had no intention of giving any wider circulation to what he had gathered. But friends were as convenient to editors in the sixteenth century as they have been to authors ever since. Speght found himself pressed by their importunities to publish what he had prepared. "Set your heart at rest," wrote the dramatist Beaumont, "for seeing I was one of them which first set you in hand with this work, and since you have given me of your copies to use privately for mine own pleasure, if you will not put them abroad yourself, they shall abroad whether you will or no. Yet lest many inconveniences might happen by this attempt of mine, and divers things be set forth contrary unto your own liking, let me once again entreat you (as I have done often heretofore) to yield to my just and reasonable suit." When gentle violence of such sort as this was further reinforced by the urgent appeals of "certain also of the best in the Company of Stationers," it was impossible for the stoutest and most strongly entrenched modesty to hold its ground. Speght, therefore, late as it was, took the matter in hand, and added a good deal to the beginning and the end of the volume. But he had not entered upon the task soon enough to accomplish sufficiently and satisfactorily all the objects he had in view. He accordingly gave pretty distinct

notice that it was his purpose to bring out a second edition. To render this as perfect as possible, he asked the help of all friendly readers to correct what was found amiss and to complete what had been left deficient.

In his address to the reader Speght had made some remarks about reforming the text by the old written copies. In this way he intimated that he hoped to do something for the memory of the poet, whose reputation had suffered by the injury his works had received not only at the hands of time, but from the ignorance of writers or the negligence of printers. There was one person to whom remarks of this kind were not altogether pleasing. He was ready at once to accept the invitation to point out the imperfections to which Speght had professed a desire to have his attention called, though he could hardly be considered perhaps as coming under the class of friendly readers. This man was Francis Thynne, the son of the first editor. He had been somewhat nettled by the apparent implication conveyed in Speght's words that there had been a good deal of negligence in the preparation of the edition of 1532, and of consequent depravation of the text. He had also been contemplating bringing out the works of Chaucer with a commentary. It was probably not altogether agreeable to his feelings to find his labors forestalled in the slightest. He accordingly wrote a series of outwardly polite, but, for all that, somewhat tart, 'Animadversions' upon the volume that had just come out. These strictures remained for centuries in manuscript. They were never printed until 1810, when they were included in Todd's 'Illustrations of the Life and

Writings of Gower and Chaucer.' But though not published at the time, there can be little doubt that they came speedily to the ears if not to the eyes of Speght. The latter was clearly a peace-loving, or at any rate a prudent, man. He did not defy his critic, but set to work to conciliate him. He offered to retire in his favor from the post of editor. The wisdom of the course he took was justified by the result. Thynne gave his aid to perfecting the second edition, which was brought out in 1602. The criticisms, especially of the significations of words, which he had made in his 'Animadversions,' were largely embodied in the new glossary that was prepared. This was nearly double the size of the one that had been contained in the folio of 1598. There were also several slight changes made in the preliminary matter, mainly, however, in the way of addition. Even the dramatist Beaumont's letter, though continuing to bear the same date of June, 1597, was in places retouched and enlarged. Some of these alterations must have been due to Thynne in the way of suggestion, though probably not in that of composition. He was, at any rate, so far conciliated as to contribute to the volume a poem in honor of Chaucer, though leaving to others the celebration of his editor. In return Speght spoke with the profoundest deference of the Thynnes, father and son. In the edition of 1598 the former had been simply passed over with slight mention as "that learned gentleman." In that of 1602 several sentences were found necessary for the full exposition of his judgment, critical insight, and the beauties of his character. The son was also mentioned with the highest respect. Attention



was called again and again to the commentary upon Chaucer he was preparing to put forth. Thus happily, at least for the parties concerned, was this particular civil war among the Muses averted. It is more than probable, however, that our knowledge of the poet and his writings would have been much further advanced had his editors fallen to blows instead of coming to accord. The world may scoff; but the elucidation of authors is largely due to the wrath of commentators. One undesirable result we are probably justified in ascribing to this peaceful settlement of a possible quarrel. Thynne never brought out the work illustrative of the poet's writings upon which he had been engaged. Beyond the 'Animadversions' already mentioned, which have of late been twice reprinted, no comment of his upon Chaucer has ever seen the light.

The claim made by Speght of having, in any genuine sense, compared the printed text with the written copies is more than doubtful, the world then as now being much given to lying on such points. Still that changes had been made, and made in consequence of the consultation of the manuscripts, we have direct evidence. Stow, in his 'Annals,' expressly asserts that this was true of the edition of 1561, or, as he gives it, of 1560. That folio, he tells us, was brought out "by view of divers written copies corrected by myself the author of this history."<sup>1</sup> No effort has ever been made to ascertain how many and how important were the alterations then introduced into the text; but it must be said that, after

<sup>1</sup> *Annals*, ed. of 1631, p. 326.

a hasty and superficial examination, they are scarcely perceptible. It is hardly so with the edition of 1598. A comparison of that with the ones that preceded it, as well as with the one that followed it, shows marked differences. This at least is true of the general Prologue. Of its 858 lines nearly a hundred have undergone alterations other than those connected with the spelling. Most of the variations consist in the adding or dropping of words. This is done usually for the sake of the metre. They are in most cases such words as *no*, *to*, *full*, *eke*, *also*, *right*, which, however necessary to the perfection of the measure, rarely have any effect in modifying the meaning. But there are about twenty lines in which the changes introduced involve to some extent a change in the sense. It is clear that whoever made them—for Speght, as has just been pointed out, was not called in until the work was well under way—must have based his alterations upon manuscript authority. They are not of the kind that could have been introduced by the most self-confident of commentators. It is to be remarked, further, that the edition of 1602 in many cases discarded these changes. It usually went back to the readings found in the earlier folios, though this was not the course that was invariably followed. To illustrate the nature and extent of the more important variations that arose, there will be given below some of the lines of the Prologue as they appear in the folios of 1542, 1561, 1598, and 1602:

- |  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| 73. For to tell you of hys aray.         | 1542, 1561, 1602. |
| For to tell you soothly of all his aray. | 1598.             |

123. Entwined in her voyce full semely. 1542, 1561, 1602.  
Entuned in her nose ful semely. 1598.
124. And Frenche she spake full fetously. 1542, 1561, 1602.  
And French she spake faire and fetously. 1598.
134. That in her cup was no ferthyng sene. 1542, 1561, 1602.  
That in her cup was no foule thing sene. 1598.
212. He had made full many a marriage. 1542, 1561, 1602.  
He had rid ful many a mariage. 1598.
219. As he sayd hymselfe, more then a curate. 1542, 1561, 1602.  
More then a parish priest or a curate. 1598.
320. Hys purchasyng myght not be to hym sus-  
pect. 1542, 1561.  
His purchasing might not ben in suspect. 1598, 1602.
359. A shyryfe had he bene, and a countour. 1542, 1561, 1602.  
A sherife had he ben, and a coronour. 1598.
361. An haberdassher there was and a carpenter. 1542, 1561, 1602.  
A goldsmith there was and an haberdasher. 1598.
453. Her kerchers ful fyne were of grounde,  
454. I durst swere they wayden ten ponde. 1542, 1561.  
Her kerchers large were and fine of ground,  
I durst sweare they waiden three pound. 1598.  
Her kerchers full large were and fine of ground,  
I durst sweare they waiden ten pound. 1602.
559. Hys mouthe as great was as a furneys. 1542, 1561, 1602.  
His mouth was as wide as a great forneis. 1598.
606. Hys dwellynge was full fayre upon an hethe. 1542, 1561.  
His wonning was full faire upon an heath. 1598, 1602.
778. For to stonden at my jugement. 1542, 1561, 1602.  
For to standen at my will and judgement. 1598.
844. Were it by aventure, or by shorter caas. 1542, 1561.  
Were it by aventure, or chance, or caas. 1598.  
Were it by aventure chance or caas. 1602.

Whether a collation of the various early editions would show as wide variation on the part of the folio of 1598 in other portions of Chaucer's writings as exists in the Prologue is doubtful. A full examination, which has never been made and hardly seems worth making, would be necessary to settle the matter beyond all dispute. While the results reached might not be sufficient to repay the labor of an exhaustive inquiry, they would perhaps be of value enough in the case of doubtful or disputed points to justify calling in the aid of the early printed texts. At present all that can be said is, that the edition of 1598 seems to present special readings of its own; while the others are not essentially different from Thynne's edition of 1532. The variations that occur are rather the result of accident than of design. They are due to that inevitable modernization which any work in antiquated modes of speech or of orthography must undergo in the process of reprinting, unless the utmost vigilance is observed. As the copy was set up again and again, corruptions would unavoidably creep in; the grammatical endings would be shortened or dropped; the spelling of words would be changed; forms and constructions not in use in the poet's time, or at least not employed by him, would make their appearance. Changes such as these, which in their character would be unimportant and in their sum not excessive, would naturally escape the eye of the careless reader or printer, though they might arrest at once the attention of the special student. The examination that has been made of this point is confessedly hasty and superficial. Such as it is, it leads to the conviction



that the edition of 1561 and Speght's edition of 1602, in spite of their pretension to have been corrected by written copies, are little more than reproductions, with occasional modernization, of the original edition of 1532.

The work which Thynne accomplished remained therefore practically unchanged for two centuries. The text of his edition was far, indeed, from being an ideal text. But it is likewise far from meriting the contempt which has been cast upon it. In these later times it has occasionally been spoken of as if it were worthy of no consideration whatever. This is very far from being the case. The poems, as printed by Thynne, were in most cases taken from fairly good manuscripts. His volume furnishes now and then readings which are superior to anything found in the written copies that have been preserved. This is especially true of some of the minor poems, more than of the 'Canterbury Tales.' In the former, in all questions of disputed readings, its witness must always have the weight of an independent authority, and, in the case of some pieces, of a comparatively high authority. Even in the latter there are instances where the failure to appeal to it has left the text in a state of unnecessary uncertainty. An illustration of the fact can be seen in the verse in the Man of Law's tale which describes the sadness that prevailed at the departure of Constance. Here is the stanza, as it appears in the Ellesmere manuscript :

"I trowe at Troye whan Pyrrhus brak the wal

1. Or Ylion brende Thebes the citee,

Nat Rome, for the harm thurgh Hanybal

That Romayns hath venquissed tymes thre,  
Nas herd swich tendre weping for pitee  
As in the chambre was for hir departinge;  
Bot forth she moot, wherso she wepe or singe."

The difficulty is in the second line. The differences in the reading of it are numerous enough to show that, even in the time of the scribes, its meaning was felt to be uncertain. In the six other manuscripts that have been printed, the line appears with insignificant variations in these four additional forms:

2. "Or Ylion brende hadde Thebes the citee."
3. "Or Ylion brende at Thebes cetee."
4. "Or Ylion that brende Thebes that citee."
5. "Or Yleon that brend Thebes the citee."

Not one of these is a possible reading, not one of them makes the slightest sense. Tyrwhitt did the best he could with the passage by putting the word *or* in the place of *hadde* in the second form of the line; but for this he admitted that he had no authority from the manuscripts. Professor Skeat has even ventured upon a more decided alteration. He throws out *Ylion*, which he asserts to be obviously wrong, and in lieu of it inserts *Theseus*. His substitution, he thinks, receives some support from the Knight's tale. The support from that quarter is, however, very slight. In the Knight's tale Theseus is not represented as burning the city of Thebes; he has merely stormed it and laid it waste. Nor, indeed, is there any necessity to resort to a change so violent. The sixteenth-century editions indicate clearly the meaning of the passage, though even in them this particular line is pretty certainly not what it was

when it came from the hands of the poet, and a special blunder of its own in the matter of a proper name adds to the general confusion. In the folio of 1532 and those based upon it the stanza quoted begins as follows :

“I trow at Troy when Thurus brake the wall  
Of Ilion, ne when brent was Thebes citee.”

This is probably not the precise reading; but it denotes the lines on which emendation must be made. The text so printed is metrically defective; but it makes clear and consistent sense. Its correctness in this latter respect will seem certain the moment we bear in mind the difference between Troy and Ilium in the version of the Trojan story which became current in the Middle Ages. In it a marked distinction prevailed between the two. The latter meant neither the town nor the region indicated by the former. Ilium was the name given by Priam to the splendid castle which he erected, alike a stronghold and a palace, when he rebuilt the city which Hercules and Jason had destroyed. Situated itself on the loftiest site in Troy, its gigantic walls rose to the height of hundreds of feet, and were surmounted by towers whose summits were lost to view in the misty air. The distinction between the two is regularly observed in Chaucer, as in the ‘Legend of Good Women,’ when he speaks of “the noble tower of Ilium,”

“That of the city was the chief dungeón.”<sup>1</sup>

This was, indeed, the common belief of the time, and can be found in all writers who treat with any detail of the Trojan story.

<sup>1</sup> Line 937. See also Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, vol. ii., p. 376 (Pauli).

Speght's second edition made its appearance, as we have said, in 1602. After that date the text, with whatever modernizations had been introduced, was to remain undisturbed for more than a hundred years. The seventeenth century was not much given to the study of antiquity; and Chaucer had now become an ancient. Yet the poet did not fail to attract the attention of the omnivorous Junius. Among the manuscripts of his own composition which, at his death in 1677, he left to the library of Oxford University, were the poems of Chaucer illustrated throughout with certain notes.<sup>1</sup> Whether he made any alterations in the text it is not possible to say. The work he did has not only never been published, it seems never to have been even examined. In the light of modern scholarship it is probably not worth examining. At any rate, Chaucer's writings were not again brought out till 1687. The volume that appeared at that time was but little more than a reprint of the previous edition. No work whatever was done upon the text. This was a state of things that could hardly be expected to continue in the case of a great English classic, even in a period when interest in our early literature could scarcely be said to exist at all.

Renewed attention began to be paid to Chaucer at the commencement of the eighteenth century. Dryden just before his death had modernized some of the poet's productions, and had written an elaborate criticism upon his poetry. The cordial praise of the great literary autocrat of his time contributed largely to enlist the interests of educated men in proceedings to which antiquarian

<sup>1</sup> Wood's *Athenæ Oxonienses*, vol. iii., p. 1142.

research had now begun to direct its efforts. There came to be a prevalent desire that a new edition of Chaucer's writings should be prepared. There is proof of this feeling in a letter sent in 1709 by Thomas Hearne to John Bagford, well known as an antiquary, better known as a ballad collector, best known as the pillager of title-pages and frontispieces, whose proud distinction was that he rarely touched a valuable book which he did not mutilate. It hardly seems possible that this notorious biblioclast had it in mind to prepare a new edition of the poet; but he certainly was engaged in amassing materials which would have been of use to any one who projected such an undertaking. He collected a number of the early editions and devoted himself largely to inquiries about Chaucer's life and writings. "Would others," wrote Hearne, "but imitate your diligence, we should understand this excellent poet much better than we do, and be able to give a far more correct edition of him than has hitherto appeared. Such an undertaking will derive great honor upon those that shall engage in it, and will be gratefully received by all true scholars and antiquaries." He then went on to enumerate the various editions that up to that time had been published. "But," he added, "notwithstanding these excellent persons' labors were so successful, as that they may seem, perhaps, to some to have superseded all future attempts, yet I may with modesty assert, that a much more correct and complete edition of Chaucer might be given than any that has hitherto appeared. I have consulted some of our Oxford manuscripts, and find that the print is in a great many places corrupted,



that in other places whole verses are wanting, which might by these helps be supplied, that sometimes the titles of the tales are changed, and that, lastly, entire tracts might be added that were never yet made public."<sup>1</sup>

There was, in fact, not merely a great desire among scholars that a new edition of Chaucer's complete works should be prepared, but also a widespread expectation that the body of his acknowledged writings could be increased by much matter hitherto unprinted. It was no easy thing, however, to find any one who had the disposition to undertake a task of this kind, or the ability to accomplish it successfully. At last, in 1711, John Urry, student of Christ Church, was fixed upon as the man best suited for the work. He tells us that he was prevailed upon to engage in it much against his own inclination. Urry had received his degree of A.B. from Oxford in 1686, and stood high in the opinion of the scholars of his time for his knowledge of Early English—for what reason, it is not easy for us now to guess. In regard to his birth and breeding, little information is accessible. He is said to have been a Scotchman. He certainly gave it as one of his qualifications for conducting an undertaking like this to a successful issue, that his knowledge of the Northern dialect spoken in the Scottish Lowlands enabled him to read the poet with an ease and pleasure to which one bred altogether south of the Trent could not attain without unusual application. He was an ardent Jacobite and a nonjuror; and his repute

<sup>1</sup> Hearne's *Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle*, vol. ii., pp. 596-606.

at Oxford for sound learning seems to have been largely due to his sound political views.

But though Urry may have taken the work upon himself reluctantly, he made arrangements to perform it upon a grand scale. He had certain definite things in his mind. The most important of these was to correct the text of Chaucer by a comparison of manuscripts; to add to the poet's works any which he could still find unprinted; to furnish a complete glossary; to write a fuller account of his life than had yet been published; to indulge in various observations upon his productions, and in particular to point out the imitations of, and borrowings from, the Greek and Latin authors. The scheme as laid down was not a bad one; considering the state of English scholarship in that age, it may be called a remarkably good one. It erred somewhat, indeed, both by omission and commission. It neglected, for instance, any obligations the English poet was under to the French and Italian writers whose words and ideas he had reproduced. As, moreover, there is no reason to suppose that Chaucer understood Greek, it would have been a curious misapplication of labor to seek to point out imitations or borrowings from that quarter. But outside of these last particulars the scheme as sketched by its author was in the line of intelligent as well as of thorough and conscientious editing.

With this general plan in his mind, Urry set about his task. He collected fourteen manuscripts of the 'Canterbury Tales.' By the careful collation of these he aimed to establish the true text. He had been thoroughly impressed with the opinion of some of his pred-

ecessors that the versification of Chaucer, so far from being rude and irregular, as was then the common belief, was, if rightly observed, harmonious and exact. In this edition, therefore, he purposed to restore the poet, to use his own words, to his feet again. Several things at once caught his eye when he came to collate the manuscripts he had collected. He observed that certain initial and final syllables, once in use, appeared, or failed to appear, in the different copies, seemingly at the pleasure of the scribe. At the beginning of words, especially of the past participles, this fact was particularly conspicuous in the case of *y* or *i*, the Early English modification of the Anglo-Saxon prefix *ge*—a prefix which still maintains a lingering existence in forms like *yclept*, and in the *e* of *enough*. In the matter of terminations, the final *e* was inevitably the one which forced itself most prominently upon his attention. This letter, he asserted, was still in use as a distinct syllable in certain parts of England. It was a natural inference, in consequence, that in such districts a pronunciation was still preserved which had once been general. As this, however, was not the invariable practice in Chaucer, the sounding of the final *e*, when required by the metre, was to be indicated by placing over it an accent. Urry pointed out also that the *ed* of the past participle, and the *es* of the genitive and of the plural of nouns, formed sometimes a distinct syllable, and sometimes not. Other means that he made use of for the rectification of the text were the addition of *en* or *in* to the verb and to certain other parts of speech; the appending of *that* to the relative *which*; and the pronunciation of vowels

now silent in the middle of words, or which have been dropped from them altogether.

Every student of Chaucer will see at a glance that Urry had hit upon some of the most approved modern methods of regulating the metre and rectifying the text of the poet. They could, indeed, hardly have been missed by him, as soon as he began to make a comparison of the written copies. The sounding of the final *e*, the prefixing of *y* or *i* to the past participle, the insertion or rejection of *that*, the pronunciation of syllables now silent, all these are fully recognized by scholars. They reveal themselves the moment different manuscripts are read at the same time. Urry also is entitled to the praise of noticing, in a vague way, that there were distinct complete groups of the 'Canterbury Tales.' At this point, however, praise must cease. Whatever was good in his plan was utterly spoiled in the execution. Of the principles that underlay the pronunciation or non-pronunciation of words, he had not the slightest conception. To the lack of knowledge was added an audacity that hesitated at nothing. In his endeavors to impart to the line syllabic regularity, there was scarcely a linguistic atrocity that he scrupled to commit. One device which he resorted to constantly, was purely arbitrary in its character. When the endings *es* and *ed* were to receive a distinct pronunciation, the vowel *e* was changed to *i* in his text. Thus *clerkes* and *lerned* would be sounded as words of one syllable, and *clerkis* and *lernid* as words of two. Such a method of indicating orthoepy might not have been regarded as specially objectionable in itself, provided its exact value was un-

derstood. But this would rarely be the case, and when not the case would cause confusion. It raised a mere dialectic variation to the dignity of a grammatical form which had a special force of its own. It was, therefore, sure to mislead, and did mislead.

Had, however, tampering with the text gone no further than this, the offence would have been venial. The liberties that Urry took with it were of a far grosser character. To help out his line, he arbitrarily inserted words which had the authority of no manuscript in their favor, and, in some instances, the authority of no usage for their meaning. He changed words he did not understand to those he supposed he did. The reader, accordingly, who should be reduced to his text would often find himself confronted with the difficulty of comprehending not what Chaucer meant, but what Urry thought he meant. The punctuation was often such as to destroy the sense. The orthography also was constantly, though not consistently, modernized. Later forms than those used by the poet, such as *them* for *hem*, *their* for *her(e)*, occur repeatedly, though not invariably. He even took a step a long way beyond this. Grammatical terminations, which as employed by him never had a real existence during any period in the history of the English language, can be found frequently on the pages of this edition. Especially is this the case with the final *en* or *in*, which Urry seemed to look upon as an auxiliary he was perfectly justified in calling to his help whenever he found himself in any metrical straits. He added it frequently to parts of the verb, where it was almost grotesquely out of place. The sort of havoc Urry made



with the grammar of the language can be seen by a few illustrations of the use to which he put this termination. In the English of Chaucer the present tense of any verb, as for instance *hope*, would be in the plural *hopè* or *hopen*. In the singular it would be precisely the same as now, save that the third person would have invariably the form *hopeth* instead of *hopes*. Urry, however, added his ending *en* or *in* to any of the three persons, if he was at a loss for a syllable to fill out the measure, and found no other resource convenient. As a result we have such lines as these :

“This ilke monk let old thingis to pace  
And *heldin* after the new world the trace.”

“And rage he couth as it *werin* a whelpe.”

“Of studie *tookin* he most cure and hede.”

“This duke of whome I *makin* mencion.”

Forms of this kind, so far as Urry was concerned, were purely a product of his own invention. He owed them neither to any familiarity with the Northern dialect of which he boasted, nor to any study of the manuscripts. Occasional lapses of a similar character do at times occur in the early printed texts, but they are too rare ever to have misled the most careless of readers. It was the perpetration of such gross grammatical blunders that fully justified Tyrwhitt in his declaration that Urry's edition was by far the worst that was ever published, and should never be opened by any one for the purpose of reading Chaucer.

Nor is it on the linguistic side alone that this pretentious volume was lacking. On the literary side its fail-

ure was as conspicuous. There is, and always will be, difference between the men who know what is Chaucer and the men who know what is good in Chaucer. But even to the level of the former class Urry had not attained. The previous editors had placed among the poet's productions a great mass of verses which they thought might be his, and some which they knew were not his. Not a line of the rubbish of his predecessors did Urry discard. He added, on the contrary, several new pieces which required a good deal of ignorance of Chaucer to ascribe to him. To this editor we owe the tale of Gamelin, the adventures of the Pardoner and Tapster at the inn in Canterbury, and the tale of Beryn. All of these have a certain interest in connection with the poet. In an edition projected on so large a scale as this they might well have deserved a place in the appendix. The inexcusable thing was their introduction as genuine works.

How far Urry himself is to be held responsible for the shortcomings of his edition is uncertain. He had not completed more than the Prologue and twelve of the 'Canterbury Tales' with their accompanying links, when he died.<sup>1</sup> It may be, therefore, that he would have saved us, as is intimated by Hearne, from the bane of his alterations by printing in the notes the original forms as an antidote. Still, with the methods which he followed in the part of the work performed by himself, he could never have presented us with a text worth consideration. The confusion in this matter that followed his

<sup>1</sup> An account of Urry's death, and his character—from the Jacobite point of view, however—will be found in Thomas Hearne's *Remains*, 2d ed., vol. i., p. 318.

death was attended with some queer results. A marked discordance of view, for instance, can be seen in the opinion expressed in the preface upon the metrical regularity of Chaucer and that found in the accompanying biography of the poet. "It is thought by some," says the writer of the latter, "that his verses everywhere consist of an equal number of feet, and that if read with a right accent are nowhere deficient; but these nice discerning persons would find it difficult, with all their straining and working, to spin out some of his verses into a measure of ten syllables. He was not altogether regardless of his numbers, but his thoughts were more intent upon solid sense than jingle." Nothing could have been a much more emphatic denial of the very view that the text had been arbitrarily and ignorantly altered to enforce.

On the strength of the changes and additions he had made, constituting it, in a measure, a new work, Urry had obtained a royal license for the sole printing and publishing of the volume for a space of fourteen years. The privilege was to begin from the twentieth of July, 1714. On the seventeenth of the following December this was assigned to the noted publisher Bernard Lintot. In the following March Urry died. He left as his executor William Brome, who still maintains a feeble hold on a species of immortality by having been addressed as "learned Brome" by John Phillips, in his poem on 'Cider.' It had been the editor's intention to apply a part of the profits of this work to building the Peckwater quadrangle. This project was not left to die out. Arrangements were made as speedily as possible

to continue the preparation of the edition for the press. Timothy Thomas, student of Christ Church, and afterwards rector of Presteigne, in Radnorshire, was employed to complete the text, to write a preface, and make out a glossary. John Dart, the antiquary, who had been collecting materials for a life of Chaucer, was allowed to contribute them, as he complains, without compensation, or even recognition. The biography he wrote did not, for some reason, prove satisfactory to those for whom he had prepared it, and very little to his own satisfaction, as we have seen, it was altered and corrected by William Thomas.<sup>1</sup> It was very doubtful if the changes were in any sense a benefit. Still, with all these helps, the work went on slowly, as was perhaps inevitable in any case. In the beginning of 1719 the volume was all ready for publication save the glossary; the preparation of that delayed its appearance for two years more. The title-page bears the date of 1721.

The later history of the edition is somewhat curious. Brome was actuated by the same feelings as his friend, and a tripartite agreement was drawn up on the sixteenth of August, 1715, between him and the dean and chapter of Christ Church and Bernard Lintot. By the terms of this agreement, Lintot was to be furnished with a completed copy of the work which he was to publish at his own expense. The volume was to be sold by subscription. The edition was to be limited to fifteen hundred—the copies to be equally divided between the three parties. The executor seems not to have come

<sup>1</sup> See chapter ii., p. 187.

very well out of the bargain. The college hit upon a happy expedient for shifting its share of the burden, and certainly adopted an original method of promoting the study of the English classics. Every scholar upon entrance was obliged to take a copy. Lintot got rid of his stock in the way of trade. Brome had no such means of relieving himself of the portion that fell to his part. Few bought his copies, and five hundred were too many to give away. "Mine lie upon my hand," he wrote as late as 1733, "and I am like to be a great sufferer."<sup>1</sup> It is pretty clear that in the period in which it came out the success of this edition was not great. It is very certain that lapse of time has added nothing to its value or attractiveness. Tyrwhitt's advice about not reading it had been followed before Tyrwhitt had had an opportunity to give it.

One thing, however, Urry's edition did for Chaucer. Its printing was as good as its editing was bad. For the first time the poet was taken out of the bondage of the black-letter, which had done its part towards making his writings obscure. That species of type had been abandoned long before 1687 for everything save laws and matters of that kind, the knowledge of which it seemed to be thought desirable should be confined to as few as possible. Yet when Chaucer's works came out in that year this disused and antiquated method of rendering reading difficult was stubbornly adhered to, as if this variation of the Roman letters were in some way essential to the purity of Chaucer's text. To the ob-

<sup>1</sup> *Letters written by Eminent Persons during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1813), vol. ii., p. 95.



scurity of unfamiliar orthography and unknown words was conscientiously added the obscurity of print. The abandonment of this type did not enter into Urry's plan. The advertisement to the proposals for subscription, published in 1714, distinctly states that a new black-letter had been cast for this particular edition. The attack of common-sense, that led his successors to take the course they did, was a source of much sorrow to conservative scholars. The peculiar aroma of Chaucer's expression was supposed somehow to evaporate as soon as his words were printed in characters that were not difficult to decipher. There was in all probability a similar party of his admirers in the fifteenth century who felt that something of the glory of the poet's verse was gone as soon as it was taken out of manuscript and put in type. There can, at any rate, be no doubt as to the feelings of some scholars of the eighteenth century at this unlooked-for innovation. The antiquary Hearne grieved over the abandonment of the black-letter, and incidentally lets us know that this was one reason why the volume had failed to come up to the expectations of students. His comments occur in a note acknowledging the receipt of a parcel of books, several of which were early copies of Chaucer. "The more I look upon such old black-lettered editions," he wrote, "the more I wish that the late edition had been printed in the black-letter, which was what my friend Mr. Urry entirely designed, as I have often heard him say, though the managers afterwards, for frivolous reasons, acted contrary to it. Curious men begin to esteem the old editions more than the new one, partly upon account of the letter, and

partly upon account of the change that hath been made in the new edition, without giving the various lections, which would have been of great service to critical men. John Stowe was an honest man, and knowing in these affairs, and would never have taken such a liberty, and I have reason to think Mr. Urry would (what I used often to tell him to do) have accounted for the alterations with a particular nicety, had he lived to have printed the book himself.”<sup>1</sup> The latter reason for the disrepute into which the new edition had fallen is sensible and just. The former is eminently characteristic of the man who not many years before had seriously noted as a sure sign of the decay of scholarship in Oxford University that the practice of having dinner on Shrove Tuesday at the hour of ten had been given up for that of twelve. “When laudable old customs alter,” he added, “’tis a sure sign learning dwindles.” He tells us, moreover, that, worse than all, there were no longer fritters at dinner as there had always been wont to be.<sup>2</sup> The type had now gone the way of the fritters. With this parting wail from the old antiquary, black-letter gave up the ghost.

Wretched as has been Urry’s execution of what he set out to do, it had made plain the path that must be taken. The text of Chaucer could be satisfactorily established only by a comparison of the manuscripts. It might seem that no object-lesson was needed to teach this almost self-evident fact; but however plain it may

<sup>1</sup> *Letters of Eminent Persons*, etc., vol. ii., p. 97. Hearne’s letter is dated March 18, 1734.

<sup>2</sup> *The Remains of Thomas Hearne*, 2d edition, 1869, vol. ii., p. 156. Diary under date of Feb. 17, 1722-3.

now appear, or whatever may have been past professions in regard to it, there can be no reasonable doubt that it had escaped the practice and possibly the attention of editors for nearly two hundred years. The attempt that had been made, though it had turned out a failure, had nevertheless been a step in the right direction. It was inevitable that it should find imitators. With the text handed down from the sixteenth century there was deep dissatisfaction; for the text that had been manufactured to take its place there was a sentiment almost akin to disgust. Such feelings could not fail to find expression in projects for new editions, though these might not often get beyond the limit of projects. Still, it was no long time that elapsed before the scheme of bringing out a revised text of Chaucer took definite shape. In 1737 appeared a specimen of a new edition under the title of 'The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer in the original, from the most authentic manuscripts, and as they are turned into Modern Languages by several Eminent Hands, with references to authors ancient and modern, various readings and explanatory notes.' The work, which appeared anonymously, was the production of Dr. Thomas Morell, a well-known classical scholar of the last century. His plan embraced several valuable features. The genuine text was to be established by a collation of the best manuscripts. The more important of the various readings were to be given in a separate appendix. Allusions, whether to history, mythology, or contemporary social life, were to be explained, words obsolete were to be defined, and lines presenting special difficulties either of construction or sense were to be

made clear. It was, moreover, to have its full share of that fungous growth which overspread all important eighteenth-century editions of the English classics, a series of parallel passages taken from other writers, ancient and modern.

The work, as will be seen, was projected on a grand scale. It is very probable that, because it was projected on so grand a scale, it was never completed. The part brought out embraced the general Prologue and the Knight's tale. It was dedicated to Frederick, Prince of Wales, whom the literary men of that day were desperately striving to consider a Mæcenas. Besides the matter already mentioned, it contained Thynne's dedication to Henry VIII., and a life of the poet, abridged from that prefixed to Urry's edition. For the preparation of the work Morell was in many ways well adapted. He had, indeed, what was at that time an indispensable qualification for an editor of Chaucer, a thorough contempt for all who had previously filled the position. None of these had, in any proper sense, been fitted for the task. Of the earlier ones, the only way in which Stow had been distinguished from Thynne, and Speght from Stow, was in the possession of superior ignorance. The audacity that Urry had displayed in tampering with the text was not likely to meet with much favor from a scholar who had been trained in the habit of treating original authorities with respect. Morell not only criticised with severity the liberties that had been taken, but avowed his intention of leaving the lines as he found them, even when the measure was defective in consequence. The arbitrary distinction be-

tween *es* and *is* and *ed* and *id* was summarily rejected. Certain of Urry's views—such, for instance, as to the use of the final *e*—he was disposed to accept, though with some modifications. His own contributions to the elucidation of the text often displayed knowledge and research. The notes at the bottom of the page, with parallel passages explanatory of the use of words, frequently contained information of value, which has more than once been rediscovered in modern times and announced with a good deal of ostentation. It was these characteristics of this edition that led Tyrwhitt to speak of it in terms of praise and to declare that, as far as it went, it was infinitely preferable to any of those which had preceded it. This commendation, as is perhaps not unnatural, has been wrested to the discredit of its utterer. Great obligation to the work has been ascribed to him. The bibliographer's manual that goes under the name of Lowndes assures us that in his notes and glossary he had conspicuously availed himself of its services. Treatment of this sort is pretty sure to be the fate of an editor who makes the mistake of speaking respectfully of his predecessors. Safety lies only in censure. There is no glossary worth mentioning in Morell's edition, and the notes that Tyrwhitt found in it hardly relieved him from the labor of a single investigation.

The truth is that while this was a good edition for its day, and contained much that was valuable, it was by no means an ideal edition. Morell was very far from being versed in the grammar of Chaucer's age. The errors he makes are sometimes of a character almost gross. Not only did he fail to have the special learning



requisite to produce a satisfactory text, but the learning he did have was to some extent an injury. The appendix was stuffed with a good deal of that etymological and historical information to which we resign ourselves in texts of Greek and Latin authors prepared for the use of schools, but which is sadly out of place in the editing of a great English classic. It was a waste of time and space to devote pages, as was done here, to such points as the derivation of the words March and April, the origin of the art of medicine, the folly of magic, and a variety of similar topics. They added to the size and cost of the volume without increasing its value. The project, indeed, doubtless fell to the ground from its own weight. The work was never continued, though a second edition of the part published appeared in 1740.

The times, in truth, were not ripe for an edition of Chaucer which involved any such expenditure of time and labor and money as this would have demanded. Yet the thought of a scheme of the kind was not confined to Morell. It is a curious fact that among the works contemplated by Dr. Johnson, but in which he went no further than to put the plan on paper, was an edition of the early poet. It was projected, if anything, on even a more extensive scale than that of either Urry or Morell. It was to be based upon manuscripts and old editions with various readings, conjectures, remarks on Chaucer's language, and the changes it had undergone from the earliest times to the poet's own age, and from his own age to the time the proposed edition appeared. It was to contain notes explanatory of customs, refer-

ences to Boccaccio and other authors from whom he had borrowed, with an account of the liberties he took in telling the stories. It was also to include a biography and an exact etymological glossary.<sup>1</sup> Scholarship suffered no loss by the failure to carry out a scheme which was probably never more than vaguely thought about. Literary criticism certainly has. An edition of Chaucer by Johnson could never have been an authority, but it would always have proved an entertainment.

The two attempts, however, that had actually been made to give to Chaucer's verse metrical regularity showed that the truth in regard to the versification was slowly making its way to the light. If his poetry seemed rude, if it sounded inharmonious, it was becoming clear to some that it was not because he did not know how to write, but because men did not know how to read. It is, of course, not to be supposed that a doctrine of this sort had made much progress by the middle of the last century. It was at first perceived only by special students, and by them but dimly. By the many it was never even heard of, and by most of those who did hear of it, it was thoroughly scouted. Still, it had made some progress. The studies of Johnson in the preparation of his dictionary could not have failed to make evident to him that the commonly received dictum in regard to the rudeness of the poet's verse must be subject to modification, if not to reversal. "There is reason to believe," he wrote in 1751, "that we have negligently lost part of our vowels, and that the silent *e*, which our

<sup>1</sup>Hawkins's *Life of Johnson* (London, 1787), p. 82.

ancestors added to most of our monosyllables, was once vocal.”<sup>1</sup> This was not said with any specific reference to Chaucer; but Gray, who had reached the same conclusion, had no hesitation in asserting that the poet’s verse must be largely judged by it. While he condemned Urry for his insertion of words and syllables unauthorized by the manuscripts to help out what seemed lame and defective in the measure, he thought it probable that a great many inequalities in the metre were owing to the neglect of transcribers, and that the manner of reading made up for the deficiencies which appeared to exist in the writing. He was the first, so far as I know, to mark clearly the effect produced upon the regularity of the verse by the change which has taken place in the accentuation of words. In spite of the authority of Dryden, whom he revered, he was disposed to believe that the metre of our ancient poets was uniform when rightly pronounced. “We undoubtedly destroy,” he wrote, “a great part of the music of their versification by laying the accent of words where nobody then laid it.” As proof of the fact he proceeded to furnish several examples which amply bore out his statement.

Gray’s observations were never published until 1814. They therefore could have been of no service in pointing out the way to the scholar who now came forward to bring clearness out of confusion, and to make known to Englishmen once more one of England’s greatest authors. This man was Thomas Tyrwhitt. What special causes aroused Tyrwhitt’s interest in the

<sup>1</sup> *The Rambler*, No. 88, Jan. 19, 1751.

poet we have no means of ascertaining. The life of the great editor of Chaucer is hardly better known than that of Chaucer himself. He was born at London in 1730; he was educated at Eton and at Merton Collège, Oxford; he became master of arts in 1756; he filled one or two political positions; he wrote a few treatises, and edited two or three works; he was made curator of the British Museum, and while holding that office died in Welbeck Street, Cavendish Square, on the fifteenth of August, 1786. This barren record contains nearly all the facts that can be easily gathered in reference to one of the most accomplished and successful students of our literature. The industry which in this generation has so assiduously devoted itself to manufacturing big biographies of small men might well turn aside from the vain effort to keep up or revive interest in persons who were dead long before they died, or from dragging the living into a publicity they dislike, in order to satisfy a reasonable curiosity which asks for some fuller details of the life of one of the greatest scholars that England has ever produced.

Tyrwhitt's edition of the 'Canterbury Tales'—the only work of Chaucer he ever edited—appeared in four volumes in March, 1775. A fifth volume, containing a glossary to all of the poet's writings, followed in 1778. In the preparation of this work Tyrwhitt collated twenty-six manuscripts, to five of which he attached a special value. His duty was not done perfunctorily. No more thorough and conscientious editing had ever before been applied to the elucidation of a great English classic. He neglected nothing that lay in his power

to perfect it. Wherever he failed it was not from lack of insight or industry, but from the general diffusion of ignorance about the English language that then prevailed, and from the influence of which he could by no possibility be wholly free. On the other hand, he was in many respects extraordinarily well fitted for the task he assumed, both by mental equipment and special acquirement. His acquaintance with the authors of the Middle Ages, who constituted no small share of Chaucer's reading, was far greater than that of any one who has since endeavored to illustrate the poet's writings; at least what he did alone in this one matter has much surpassed the combined labors of all who have since followed in his footsteps, valuable as have been the services of some. Many of the most loudly vaunted modern discoveries were anticipated a century ago by this quiet scholar. They have usually escaped attention because they were packed away in a few sentences, and relegated to a position in some obscure note. A modern investigator would have made out of some of them a pamphlet or a volume. In so doing he would often have been fully justified by the value of what he had brought to light. Some things that bear out this statement have already been noticed, and more will occur in the course of this work. One, however, is well worthy of specific mention at this point. The story of Troy, that found currency and belief in the Middle Ages, has always had a special interest to students of literature on account of the wide difference that existed in details, and still more in sympathies, between it and the one handed down in Greek legend. We can see its influence as late



as the time of Shakspeare in the manner in which Hector in the 'Troilus and Cressida' is represented as meeting his death at the hands of Achilles. Language itself, in fact, in the disparaging sense given to the word "myrmidon," still continues to afford an echo of a long-forgotten prejudice in favor of the conquered race. Who was the originator of this story with its circumstantial details of battles never fought, of deeds never done, by heroes that never lived, and yet with all its events accepted for centuries as true history? The main source from which most of the others were borrowed was the 'Trojan History' of Guido da Colonna, a Sicilian physician. This was a work written in Latin prose, and finished in 1287. It was the grand repository from which numberless new stories, with amplifications of the original and fresh inventions of the borrower, found their way into every cultivated tongue of Europe. But was Guido da Colonna the creator of the legend? It has lately been shown by a French scholar that the 'Trojan History' was itself little more than a translation from the *Roman de Troye*, of Benoît de Sainte-More, who flourished a century earlier. In the proof of this statement he has displayed immense industry and erudition, and deserves fully all the praise he has received. Yet it is the merest justice to Tyrwhitt to say that he had anticipated the conclusion of the French scholar, though he contented himself simply with the assertion, and did not furnish the demonstration. His observation occurs in a note on the dream of Andromache, which is referred to in the tale of the Nun's Priest. "We must not look," he wrote, "for this dream of Androm-

ache in Homer. The first author who relates it is the fictitious Dares, and Chaucer very probably took it from him, or from Guido da Colonna; or perhaps from Benoît de Sainte-More, whose *Roman de Troye* I believe to have been that History of Dares which Guido professes to follow, and has, indeed, almost entirely translated. A full discussion of this point, by a comparison of Guido's work with the *Roman de Troye*, would require more time and pains than I am inclined to bestow upon it." He proceeded, however, to add a circumstance by which he thought the matter could be settled speedily and decisively.

Tyrwhitt, moreover, possessed certain other qualities without which indeed his learning, intelligence, and thoroughness would have been shorn of half their value. He had by nature that judicial cast of mind which rendered it impossible for him to frame assumptions of his own or adopt those of others under the impression either that they were fact or were evidence of fact. The sanest of English poets had the good fortune to meet with the sanest of editors. Tyrwhitt was animated by but one desire, that of ascertaining the truth; not what he would like to have the truth, nor what he had argued himself into believing beforehand was the truth. He was never led astray by captivating conjectures. He never fancied that he added to the strength of statements that could not be proved by the persistent reiteration of his belief in them. In all doubtful matters, indeed, he was wholly free from that confidence of conviction and positiveness of assertion to which easy omniscience is so generously addicted. He did not be-

gin by forming theories and then go about searching for reasons to sustain them. He had, besides, the intellectual independence which prevented him from paying respect to authority, no matter how eminent, which did not itself respect the truth. In one particular he had attained a level rarely reached by editors or commentators. When he did not know anything, he knew he did not know it. Wherever, therefore, his information was adequate, his conclusions are to be fully trusted; for he never elevated surmise into any higher position than that of surmise. These are points that concern the text of the poet but indirectly: in those that concern it directly his merits were of a far loftier type. His literary taste can be described as almost unerring. The felicity with which in the case of conflicting readings he seized upon the one most poetical was something that was rarely known to fail. And it is never to be forgotten that in settling the text of Chaucer it is not merely the special learning of the grammarian, or the general learning of the scholar, that must be brought to bear upon the subject: above both of these must be ranked the cultivated taste of the man of letters. It seems almost too much to hope that a combination of learning, of critical sagacity, of appreciation of poetry as poetry, will ever meet again in the person of another willing to assume and discharge the duties of an editor of Chaucer.

Tyrwhitt's work is, of course, far from perfect. A vast advance has been made since his time in our knowledge of the early language; and it is easy enough now to point out flaws in his performance. There have been

plenty of men eager to display their erudition by engaging in the occupation. His text is specially defective in the matter of orthography. Forms are found in it which could never have come from the pen of Chaucer. Of the use of the final *e* he had acquired a fair knowledge—for his time, in fact, great knowledge; but he had not gained complete knowledge, which even at this day, however, can hardly be said to have been attained by any one. He added the letter occasionally to words, especially to parts of the verb, where modern scholarship recognizes it to be sadly out of place. A preterite singular, for instance, such as *sange*, would be inadmissible in the grammar of Chaucer; yet it can be found in Tyrwhitt's text.<sup>1</sup> While his remarks, too, on the language and versification of the poet are far above the standard of his age, and can still be read with profit, they contain at times serious errors. The facts he gives can almost always be trusted fully; it is when he comes to the explanation of the facts that he is frequently at fault. His remarks on what was for long centuries the most perplexing problem in English inflection—the forms of the verb—and his explanation of the methods by which the final *ed* of the preterite and past participle had been contracted and abbreviated are most unhappy. His account of the substitution, as he terms it, of the termination *en* for *ed* in the participles of the strong conjugation is more than unhappy, it is distressing. Still, it can hardly be regarded as seriously to his discredit that, living in the eighteenth century, he failed to anticipate the discoveries of Grimm.

<sup>1</sup> E. g., Prologue, line 121.

Besides this, he occasionally made mistakes which were due to lack of acquaintance with the source from which the passage in the text was derived, or more probably from a failure to examine it with care. This is very uncommon. Still it occurs, as can be seen by the following illustration. The Wife of Bath, in the prologue to her tale, defends the married life against the celibate. She is, however, perfectly willing to acknowledge the correctness of the theory which attributes a moral superiority to the state of virginity. She does not on that account have the slightest desire to embrace it, or feel the least envy of those who are held in higher estimation because they have embraced it. Speaking of women who had devoted themselves to a life of holiness, she says, as the passage appears in the best manuscripts:

“Let hem be bread of purèd<sup>1</sup> wheate<sup>2</sup> seed  
And let us wivès hoten<sup>2</sup> barley bread;  
And yet with barley bread Mark tellè can  
Our Lord Jesú refreshèd many a man.”

Tyrwhitt follows the sixteenth-century editions and some very good manuscripts in printing the first two lines as follows:

“Let hem with bread of purè wheat be fed,  
And let us wives eaten barley bread.”

This reading is seen to be distinctly inferior when compared with the passage in St. Jerome's treatise which Chaucer had in view. It makes sense of a certain kind, but it does not make the exact sense. The married

<sup>1</sup> Refined.

<sup>2</sup> Be called.



woman is represented as standing in the same relation to the virgin that barley bread does to the finest wheat bread. The Wife of Bath cheerfully admits it. All she contends for is that barley bread is good enough in itself, and in particular that the life denoted by it is good enough for her.<sup>1</sup>

There are other defects that might be mentioned. That Tyrwhitt's knowledge of practical science was not equal to his literary taste may well be conceded. That in consequence he failed in some instances to penetrate into his author's exact meaning has been clearly shown.<sup>2</sup> Yet all these deficiencies and errors, if put together, are slight when contrasted with the positive excellences of his work. They justify no one in depreciating him or in assuming in reference to him a tone of superiority, because the advance of knowledge has shown that some of the forms he used were incorrect, and some of the readings he adopted were erroneous. The merit of Columbus is not in the least dwarfed by the fact that others before him had suggested or asserted that the earth was round; nor is he to be despised because he died with beliefs about the world whose existence he

<sup>1</sup> The passage to which Chaucer is alluding can be found in the first book of the treatise of St. Jerome against Jovinian. He is arguing that while virginity is preferable to marriage, marriage is of course preferable to licentiousness. His words are as follows: "Velut si quis definiat: Bonum est triticeo pane vesci, et edere purissimam simlam. Tamen ne quis compulsus fame comedat sterces bubulum, concedo ei ut vescatur et hordeo. Num idcirco frumentum non habebit puritatem suam, si fimo hordeum praeferatur?"

Of the Six-text edition, the Ellesmere, Hengwrt, and Cambridge manuscripts give the lines as they appear in the extract first given. The other three manuscripts of this edition give the lines as found in Tyrwhitt. The Harleian manuscript furnishes the worst reading of all, as it has one line of one reading and the second line of the other, thus hopelessly confusing the two.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix to Brae's edition of the *Astrolabe*, London, 1870.

had revealed which the stupidest of schoolboys now knows to be false. The things wherein Tyrwhitt failed were the ones in which any one, living in his time, was certain to fail. On the other hand, the things wherein he succeeded were the very ones in which few, if any, of his time besides himself would have succeeded. Nor have we yet taken so immense a stride in advance of him that we can afford to plume ourselves unduly upon our progress. Even had the advance been far greater, it is not for the generation which is reaping the harvest that he sowed to belittle his services, to lay stress upon his failures, or to attribute to superiority of intellect on its part what is due merely to the accident of time. The work he did for Chaucer is something that can never be overestimated, especially for the influence it exerted in arousing at last an interest in the poet's writings. Literary appreciation, in the case of a great classic, is not only more important than linguistic knowledge, but in order to have the latter at all it is usually necessary that the former should precede. Tyrwhitt was the first who succeeded in making Chaucer known, after centuries of comparative neglect, to any large circle of his countrymen. The process of engaging their attention, even with the assistance he gave them, was by no means a rapid one. He tells us himself that his labor brought him no pecuniary return—the usual experience of those who accomplish great feats of scholarship. It was not till 1798—twelve years after his death—that the second edition of his text of the 'Canterbury Tales' came from the Clarendon press at Oxford. But the way in which the first edition was received,

when it appeared, is even more suggestive of the little knowledge of the poet that then prevailed among the educated classes. The work was the greatest that had ever been done in the elucidation of any English classic. It far surpassed in skill and completeness everything that Spenser had received or that Shakspeare had suffered at the hands of commentators. Yet it was discussed but slightly in the reviews and magazines of the time. Even then it was always mentioned in those guarded phrases to which the critic resorts who is treating a subject of which he does not know enough to risk the expression of praise or censure. The 'Monthly Review,' the leading literary periodical of the time, dealt with it with masterly reserve. It devoted to its consideration a little more than a page, and most of that was taken up, wisely so far as it was concerned, with Tyrwhitt's own words. The 'Critical Review' was more generous. It gave to the work two pages and a half. In them the writer, while somewhat dazed by the necessity of expressing an opinion upon a subject of which he was more than ordinarily ignorant, was disposed to accord it all the praise he dared. The 'London Magazine' discussed it in eighteen lines with patronizing ignorance. "The editor," it said, "is well acquainted with his subject; his essay contains many excellent remarks upon the state of our ancient poetry, and a good defence of our old bard Chaucer as to his metre." The 'Scots Magazine' briefly assured its readers that the work was "executed with fidelity." Most of the periodical publications, with the 'Gentleman's Magazine' at their head, did not notice it at all.

One unsought-for acknowledgment of respect it received. That tribute was not denied it which is always paid to the efforts of scholarship or genius by those who are solicitous to diffuse information among the people at the expense of others and for the profit of themselves. The work had not been entered at Stationers' Hall; it seems that in consequence it did not come within the protection of the copyright law. The result was that it was speedily pirated. Its text of the 'Canterbury Tales' was adopted in that part of Bell's collection of the English poets, in one hundred and nine volumes, which contained the writings of Chaucer. In this form it was printed at the Apollo press, Edinburgh, in 1782. According to the theory loudly proclaimed by book-pirates, Tyrwhitt ought to have been delighted as an individual with this spontaneous recognition paid to the merit of his work, and gratified as a friend to humanity by having the result of his labors scattered broadcast without the slightest trouble on his own part. He appears to have taken a different view. In a private letter written shortly after, he expressed a good deal of indignation at the assured way in which his own name had been used by the publishers, as if he himself had been a party to the transaction.<sup>1</sup> He was even more offended by the carelessness with which his work had been reprinted, for this had a tendency to deprive him of his reputation as an accurate and competent scholar. "Several errors," he wrote, "which I had actually pointed out for correction, have either been left unamended,

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1783, vol. liii., p. 461.

or have been amended in such a blundering manner as to require still further correction. That the errors of the press have been considerably multiplied, I am rather inclined to presume from the known practice of Book-seller-Editors, than to endeavour to prove by collation. Indeed the types, especially in the Notes, are much too small for my eyes, however well suited they may be to the eyes of the very young persons, who, I apprehend, are the principal customers of the Apollo-press. That this publication was solely intended for their use, is still further evident from Mr. Bell's having printed the greatest part of Chaucer's works from Urry's edition; in which (as you know very well) there is scarce a line as the author wrote it. Having given them a picture at the beginning of each volume, he seems to have thought (and perhaps with reason) that they would be perfectly unconcerned about everything else."

But however little was the sensation which Tyrwhitt's edition made at its first appearance, or however little the appreciation it received, the advance of time brought for it a constantly increasing measure of esteem. His text speedily became adopted, not merely as the standard one, but as the only one. During the first half of the present century it was reproduced both in England and America in numerous editions of all sorts and sizes. There was nothing meretricious about its popularity. There was for a long time no discordant voice in the expression of respect with which it was greeted. Scholars might dissent from the views which Tyrwhitt had taken, might point out facts he had overlooked or misapprehended, but no one thought of denying him



the honor he had justly earned. This unanimity of opinion was a generous and deserved recognition on their part of the services of a man who had rescued a great English classic from centuries of misunderstanding, which itself had led in turn to the depreciation of what was not understood. It was reserved for a scholar, almost of our own day, to inform the world how ignorant it had been of the real Chaucer and of the true way of ascertaining his text. The legitimate conclusion could not fail to be drawn that, compared to himself, Tyrwhitt was a blunderer and a tyro. To a certain extent this view prevailed. For a while after he set the fashion it became very much the custom to speak in disparaging terms of the great editor. Even when matters have not gone quite so far as this, it has been no unusual thing for men whose acquirements have not been particularly respectable to talk patronizingly of the respectable acquirements of Tyrwhitt.

The man referred to was Thomas Wright. He died in 1877; but his name had been long held in highest repute, and still continues to be held by many in high repute. If writing scores of treatises, if editing scores of books, if belonging to scores of learned societies constitute a great scholar, Wright certainly deserves the title of one of the greatest scholars that ever lived. There is no doubt, indeed, that he was a man of extensive attainments upon an extensive number of subjects. This last was perhaps his foible. It may be that he was so ambitious to do many things that he never gave himself the time to do any one thing thoroughly. Or it may be that he was under a pecuniary pressure that compelled

him to turn off hastily tasks which a man with a higher conception of duty would not under the conditions have ventured to take upon himself at all. Whatever the cause, there can be little question as to the consequence. As an editor he was of the most exasperating kind. He was neither bad enough nor good enough. He neither did his work so poorly that it became a matter of immediate necessity that it should be done over again; nor did he do it so well that the necessity of its being done again was for a long time, if not forever, destroyed. He never seems to have had the slightest conception of the obligation assumed by him who undertakes to set before his countrymen a satisfactory text of a great English classic. Certain it is that he never showed the least disposition to discharge fully the duties of such an office, which from its very nature must be self-imposed. Of the numerous works to which his name is attached, there is not one which I have had any occasion to consult that can be spoken of as having been ideally edited. More than that, there is confessedly not one which reaches his own ideal, however high or low that may have been. He was apt to content himself with declaring that he had added a few hasty notes which had occurred to him in the course of revising the text. These were only inserted, he would remark apologetically, in the hope of rendering some of the passages more intelligible to the general reader—the general reader being the one person who would most scrupulously avoid having anything to do with productions of the kind in which Wright was interested. The labor of making the work as complete as lay in his power, or

even reasonably complete, was always prevented, according to his statement, by the stress of other duties, or the want of sufficient leisure to enable him to undertake the necessary extensive researches. He seemed to be unaware of the fact that there was no compulsion resting upon him to assume any particular editorial duty; and to be equally unaware, after having assumed it, that there was any moral obligation resting upon him to perform it thoroughly.

All this might, however, be passed over without comment, if it could not be pardoned, were it not for his assault upon the conduct and capacity of a man far greater than himself, and with a far loftier standard of scholarship, of accuracy, and of taste. Wright's first attack upon Tyrwhitt was made in 1844. In that year he published under the title of *Anecdota Literaria* a collection of short poems in English, Latin, and French, illustrative of the history and literature of England during the thirteenth century. In this he printed a French *fabliau*, which he asserted to be the original of the Reeve's tale. For the purpose of facilitating comparison he added the English version of the story from the Harleian Manuscript No. 7334, which he subsequently edited as a whole. It was really given, however, to enable him to express some extraordinary views about Chaucer himself, which will be discussed elsewhere, but more especially some views about the poet's editor. "It is truly to be lamented," he remarked, pathetically, "that a text of Chaucer so utterly corrupt as that of Tyrwhitt should continue to be reprinted. Tyrwhitt fell into the error of attempting to *make up* the text of an author, when he

was totally ignorant of the grammatical construction of his language, and equally incompetent to appreciate the comparative value of the manuscripts. The consequence is that there is not perhaps a single line in Tyrwhitt's edition of the 'Canterbury Tales' which Chaucer could possibly have written. The very worst manuscript in existence contains a better text, because it was at least grammatically correct for the time in which it was written, whereas in Tyrwhitt all grammar is set at defiance."

This preposterous statement Wright made, as such misstatements are always made, from a sense of duty. He felt, he tells us, the necessity of speaking plainly about the text he thus criticised, because it was still too generally received as a correct one. In the *Anecdota Literaria* he subjoined a series of notes to the tale he printed, comparing it with the version of Tyrwhitt, and pointing out the various errors of the latter in taste, critical judgment, linguistic knowledge, and knowledge of the manuscripts. He did not stop here. A little later he brought out his new text of the 'Canterbury Tales,' a reprint of Harleian Manuscript No. 7334. This work was originally included among the publications of the Percy Society. The first two volumes appeared in 1847, and the third in 1851. In the introduction to this edition Wright repeated and re-enforced his previous remarks about Tyrwhitt's entire ignorance of the language of Chaucer, and declared that his want of philological knowledge had resulted in rendering his text inharmonious and ungrammatical. As proofs of his assertion he gave substantially the same examples as before, and stated them in almost the same words.

That errors arising from ignorance—rarely, indeed, from carelessness—were to be found in Tyrwhitt's text and observations would have been conceded then as well as now by the most enthusiastic admirer of the services which that editor had rendered the early poet. There was, of course, a certain amount of truth in Wright's assertions. But the amount of truth was largely overstated, and its importance overestimated. The latter would have been the case, even if all that was charged had been within the bounds of just critical censure. While this might have destroyed the linguistic value of the received text, it would have had but little effect upon its literary value. If Tyrwhitt had no grammatical knowledge, he had poetic taste. This his critic not only gave no evidence of possessing, but gave a good deal of evidence of not possessing. To those of us who believe that the ideas of an author are of vastly more importance than the form in which his words are spelled, a guide who can enable us to penetrate the meaning and appreciate the beauty of a great classic production will always seem preferable to one who enables us to comprehend merely the correctness of its orthography and the character of its grammatical structure. To write *swore* instead of *swor* as the preterite singular of the verb, or *full* instead of *ful* or *fulle*, or *gentleness* instead of *gentlenesse* or *gentlenes*, to make a hundred variations of this character, would hardly disturb the enjoyment of the poetry as poetry on the part of a single reader. Not but that it is both desirable and important to reproduce the ancient text correctly in such points, as long as there is a profession made to that effect. So far as Tyrwhitt



failed to do this, it was right to point out the neglect; though it was not particularly creditable to assume a tone of superciliousness, as if superiority of knowledge due to the fortune of having been born at a later period were to be ascribed to superiority of learning or intellect. Unhappily, however, for Mr. Wright, many of his illustrations of Tyrwhitt's ignorance were little more than exhibitions of his own. He was very positive upon many points upon which a fuller examination would have saved him from committing himself unreservedly. He knew a great deal more about the use of the final *e* than the latest investigations justify us in knowing. Upon one specimen of Tyrwhitt's ignorance of the grammar of Chaucer's period he laid special stress. He gave an account of it in almost the same words, both in the *Anecdota Literaria* and in his Introduction to the 'Canterbury Tales.' He tells us that for the preterite of the verb *to set*,<sup>1</sup> which could only be *sette*, Tyrwhitt had substituted *set*, a form which did not exist; and in the same manner, in the verb *to creep*, he had given a preterite singular *crepte*, when the real forms were in the singular *creep*, *crope*, and in the plural *cropen*. It is an interesting comment upon this statement that in his own vaunted text of the 'Canterbury Tales,' while the form *sette* is more common, the form *set* occurs almost a dozen times.<sup>2</sup> It was even worse with his other illus-

<sup>1</sup> In the Introduction to the *Canterbury Tales* this appears as *sit*, the preterite of which could only be *sat* in the singular, not *sette* nor *set*; but this is too bad a blunder for Wright, and I cite the form as it appears in the *Anecdota Literaria*.

<sup>2</sup> In Wright's print of the Harleian manuscript, the form *set* occurs in lines 2986, 5058, 6956, 7359, 8109, 8166, 9457, 11124, 11133, 11337, and 14704. A fuller examination might very likely show other instances.

tration. In the Reeve's tale, which he had printed in the *Anecdota Literaria*, the preterite *crepte*, to which he had objected in this very volume, appeared in line 273 along with the preterite *creep* in line 306. The same dual condition of things, it may be added, can be seen in other parts of Chaucer's writings. Both the strong preterite *creep* and the weak preterite *crepte* belonged to the grammar of that period in the same manner as in the grammar of this day the verb *thrive* has for its past tense both *throve* and *thrived*.

These are far from being the only instances where Wright showed his capacity to criticise the man whose errors a sense of duty compelled him to point out. Occasionally he did exhibit signs of relenting. In the Introduction to his edition of the 'Canterbury Tales' he condescended to assure his readers that there was much that was useful and valuable in Tyrwhitt's notes, and that he had transferred them without scruple to his own work. There was no question about the lack of scruple. Little there was of importance in his commentary which he did not owe to the predecessor he disparaged. Rarely was it that his obligations were acknowledged. He at times indulged in criticism and correction. One specimen of these is worth considering in detail, because it is a suggestive illustration of the scrupulous care which Tyrwhitt exercised in the preparation of his text, and of the unscrupulous carelessness with which it was sought to be set right by his critic. In the prose tale of Melibeus, the hero is represented as summoning to council a large number of persons of all callings to decide whether he should revenge himself upon certain ene-

mies who had done him a great wrong. Among others, the surgeons present say that it is not their business to nourish war. The physicians are represented as agreeing in opinion with the surgeons, but go on to add, as their words stand in Tyrwhitt's text, that "right as maladies be cured by her contraries, right so shall men warish [i. e., cure] war." It is at this point that there ensues a wide divergence in the readings. In the sixteenth-century editions the last clause of the passage quoted appears "right so shall men warish war by peace." An entirely opposite meaning is given in the Harleian text. In this matter the six texts since published agree with it. They all read without exception, "right so shall men warish war by vengeance." Wright adds a note, pointing out Tyrwhitt's omission of the words "by vengeance," and remarks that the text printed by himself furnishes the correct form of the passage. The absurdity of the statement did not seem to strike him. The physicians are represented as agreeing with the surgeons. Yet with his reading they give exactly opposite counsel. So, were this passage alone to be considered, it would be clear that the sentence could only be ended properly with the words "by peace," as it appears in the early printed editions. The further development of the story demonstrates beyond cavil, however, that Tyrwhitt's reading is the only one that can possibly be correct. The point made by the physician has been designedly left undecided. Later in the piece there arises a discussion as to what can be its meaning. The wife of Melibeus asks her husband what he understands by the remark of the physicians, that one contrary is cured by another con-

trary. The latter gives it as his explanation that, as his enemies have revenged themselves upon him, he in turn is to revenge himself upon them. The wife then proceeds to point out the folly of this interpretation. As wickedness is not the contrary of wickedness, nor wrong of wrong, nor vengeance of vengeance, she maintains that these advisers by their answer must have meant that wickedness must be cured by its contrary, goodness, discord by accord, and war by peace. It is to be added that the remote Latin original of this story, the *Liber Consolationis et Consilii* of Albertano da Brescia is in full harmony with Tyrwhitt's reading, the correctness of which, indeed, could not well be denied as soon as the complete story was carefully examined.<sup>1</sup>

But individual errors were not the only kind of fault that Wright found with Tyrwhitt and his version. It was not merely the results that were attacked, but the methods that were employed. There was but one proper way, he asserted, of editing Chaucer, and that way Tyrwhitt had not followed. This proper way was announced with great positiveness. Wright declared that the plan of forming the text of any early work from "a number of different manuscripts, written at different times and places, is the most absurd plan which it is possible to conceive." To establish a satisfactory text of Chaucer, therefore, we must, in the first place, give up

<sup>1</sup> Post illum unus de medicis physicæ de consilio et voluntate aliorum consuluit quasi similia. Et post multa verba suum auxilium atque consilium circa medicinæ artem pro filia sua illi, pro se et aliis prepromisit. Circa vero guerram atque vindictam

sic ait: Dicimus quia, sicut per physicam contraria contrariis curantur, ita et in guerra atque vindicta et in aliis rebus contraria contrariis curari consueverunt. — *Liber Consolationis et Consilii*, cap. ii.

the early printed editions. We must then go back to the manuscripts, but, instead of bundling them all together, we must pick out the one best manuscript, which should also be the one nearest to the author's time. This Wright announced that he had done. He found in the British Museum the Harleian Manuscript so often mentioned already to be the one that satisfied all the conditions. It was, besides, free from defects caused by the ignorance or negligence of the scribes. By the aid of it we could hope, in consequence, to reproduce for all practical purposes the exact language and versification of the poet.

This theory was not first broached by Wright, though so far as he was concerned it may have been entirely original. Earlier in the century it had been held by George Chalmers. On this very ground he had then decried Tyrwhitt's method of editing. "A fictitious text like Tyrwhitt's 'Chaucer' will never do," he wrote to the publisher, Constable, on occasion of Lord Glenbervie's proposed edition of Gavin Douglas.<sup>1</sup> The theory of Chalmers was essentially that of Wright. As stated in its bald simplicity, it was nothing less than applying the doctrine of verbal inspiration to a manuscript produced by a good copyist after an author's death. One might fairly hesitate in applying such a doctrine to a manuscript coming from the author's own hand. In the case of Chaucer, Wright himself was wise enough not to act in full accordance with his manifesto. He tells us that he made a few alterations, though only such as were ab-

<sup>1</sup> Preface to *Works of Gavin Douglas*, vol. i., p. viii. (1874).



solutely necessary. His chief reliance for these few changes was the Lansdowne Manuscript No. 851, which of those in the British Museum appeared to him to be next in antiquity and value to the one he had selected as the basis of his edition. This manuscript has since been printed in its entirety, and we now know it to have hardly been worth printing at all. Beyond this Wright did very little collation. He found, as he tells us, that he did not reap much advantage from comparing a large number of texts. In the more important changes that were made, he printed also the passage as it originally appeared; but he did not think it necessary, he said, to load the book with notes, showing slight alterations. It never seemed to occur to him that his practice entirely destroyed whatever value his theory possessed. If a manuscript can be corrected by collation in half a dozen places, to suit the views of one man, it may, with like propriety, be corrected in half a hundred, to suit the views of another. It is not a question of kind, but of degree; and the degree will inevitably vary with the general culture and special fitness of the one who undertakes the work of editing. As a matter of fact, no one can scrupulously follow a single manuscript of Chaucer without involving himself at times in manifest absurdities. The chief advantage of comparing a number of them is to correct the errors that will have made their way into the very best. In the absence of a copy coming from the poet's own hand, the text must be made up; and, though one particular manuscript may be taken as a basis, it will never do to trust blindly to its authority.

The Harleian text, in truth, was as inferior to Tyr-

whitt's from the literary point of view as it was superior from the purely linguistic. To speak of it as a satisfactory reproduction of Chaucer's meaning and versification throughout was utterly misleading. It was a good text; it was far from a perfect one. There are plenty of passages in it in which the expression is weakened, or the sense perverted, or at times destroyed. There are scores of halting lines in it, which no amount of elocutionary surgery can make do anything else than hobble. The fact is that its readings vary so frequently and so decidedly from those contained in the Ellesmere manuscript, now generally accepted as the standard, that an impression is given that it is a copy of the first draught of the work as it left the writer's hands, while the Ellesmere is the copy of it in its revised and completed state. Wright's theory of following one manuscript exclusively broke down the moment it came to be applied to the particular one of the excellence of which he had boasted. That it should have held its ground after this text had been printed was partly due to the weight of its originator's authority; partly due, also, to the linguistic craving that had begun to seize the minds of men for the reproduction of the precise words and forms of the past. Wright had also at that period the ear of the public. No one ventured to dispute his dictum, or to question the accuracy of his very inaccurate assertions. The Harleian manuscript became, in consequence, the one which was adopted as the text of the 'Canterbury Tales' in the two editions of Chaucer that not long after followed.

The first of these was included in Robert Bell's anno-

tated edition of the 'English Poets,' a collection which never got beyond twenty-four volumes. Eight of the twenty-four were given up to Chaucer. These were printed separately, and came out at intervals during the years 1854, 1855, and 1856. In 1878 they reappeared in four volumes, with a preliminary essay by Professor Skeat. Bell, in his preface, acknowledged his large indebtedness to the Reverend John Mounteney Jephson, especially in the notes, and in the introductions to the various poems. It has since been a common assertion, I know not on what authority, that the edition is essentially the work of the latter. Wright also lent his aid. It is perhaps to his suggestion that we owe the introduction of a feature as commendable as it was novel. In this edition an attempt was made to furnish a satisfactory text of the minor poems. It was made for the first time, for it is an abuse of language to call the treatment to which these were subjected in Urry's volume by the name of editing. Recourse in this instance was had, in nearly every case, to the best manuscript or manuscripts accessible—an undertaking at that day of much labor and difficulty. Up to this period, these pieces had usually been printed as they appeared in the early folios. They seem, indeed, to have excited scarcely any popular attention for centuries. Still, some of the shorter pieces could hardly fail to have been embraced in a scheme which Pinkerton had in view, though it was never carried out. "You know well," he wrote to the publisher John Nichols, in October, 1783, "that there was no edition of Cowley for fifty years, till your friend, Dr. Hurd, published his select works, which have passed

through four editions already. I hope the like success would attend the select works of Geoffrey Chaucer, and submit this to you, that you may consider if it is worth your while to try. Lose you cannot, in my opinion; for every purchaser of Johnson's poets would buy the book, to complete their sets; and I am much mistaken if the work would not be very popular, and your gain very considerable; but you are the only judge. My love of Chaucer has induced me to dwell on the subject *con amore*; and I doubt not but you will ponder well ere you pronounce on a design so important to English literature and antiquity, of which you are no mean proficient."<sup>1</sup> It will be noticed that this was planned during Tyrwhitt's life, and Pinkerton, Nichols may well have thought, was not the man to come into competition with the great editor. Still, had the work been undertaken, there is no reason to doubt that some, if not many, of the minor poems would have been included. In that case they would very certainly have been printed from manuscripts. But the project, apparently, never got any further than the proposal.

Besides the new version of the minor poems, there was in this edition of Bell a good deal of annotation. Some of it is interesting as marking the long distance that has been travelled during the last thirty years in the study of our early tongue. Certain explanations that are made in it could not possibly be made now, even by scholars much inferior. Thus, for illustration, in the 'House of Fame,' Chaucer represents himself as

<sup>1</sup> Nichols's *Illustrations of Literary History*, etc., vol. v., p. 674.

seeing come a great company "of alles kynnes condicions."<sup>1</sup> In Bell's edition, *alles kynnes*, which means "of all sorts," appears as *alle skynnes*, and the annotation to the text is as singular as the text itself. "The printed editions," it says, "read *kynd of*, but the reading in the text is probably correct. The meaning is 'a great company of all conditions of skin, i. e., of all complexions or races.'" It would, however, be gross impropriety to sneer at this edition on account of the presence of a few unfortunate comments of the kind just quoted. In a region even now so little traversed, all of us are in peril of occasionally missing the way. Far greater was the danger thirty years ago. There was a good deal of very honest and intelligent labor done in the editing of this work. Most of the notes are valuable and helpful, and many of them do not require to be superseded. Commentary, to be sure, always has something of the character of an excrescence; but a certain amount of it is essential to the full comprehension of an author so remote in time as is Chaucer. The lack of annotation is something that detracts in a measure from the value of the edition that followed. This was the one included in the New Aldine series of the 'British Poets.' It came out in six volumes in 1867, under the supervision of Richard Morris. Its text of the 'Canterbury Tales' was also based upon the Harleian manuscript printed by Wright. Many changes were made, though these were indicated by italics. The minor poems were taken directly from the manuscripts. Far more care was

<sup>1</sup> Line 1530.



used in the selection of these originals than had been the case in the previous edition. In this last respect, however, the two were immensely in advance of anything that had before appeared in print.

But both these editions suffered also from too close an adherence to the Harleian text. Chaucer received little immediate benefit from this course, though the student of Chaucer did. The one great service which Wright rendered the poet deserves here the fullest acknowledgment. He was the first to furnish a fairly accurate reproduction of a good manuscript produced at a period little later than the poet's death. For the study of his language, therefore, it possessed a value that could never have been accorded to any purely arbitrary text, though made up by the greatest of scholars, and ideally perfect in its literary character. It enabled the metrical and grammatical structure of his compositions to be studied, as they had never been before, by those who had no access to manuscripts. Tyrwhitt's theory about the pronunciation of Chaucer's verse had met with general acceptance, but not with universal. There were some who protested against it, though it was not often they ventured to express their objections in print. Still, there was a good deal said, in a vague way, about rhythmical versification as contrasted with metrical versification; in a lofty way about quantity and time as contrasted with accent; and in a scornful way about counting verses on the fingers, and similar mere mechanical expedients. Men of a certain order of intellect, who exhibit a special aptitude for converting the plain into the obscure, could naturally

not rest content with so simple an explanation as Tyrwhitt had given. Elaborate theories were accordingly framed upon the subject. One of these, advanced by Sibbald, may be taken as a specimen of them all. This author produced a 'Chronicle of Scottish Poetry,' which appeared about the beginning of the present century. In it he took occasion to express his opinion of the method followed by the early poets. "That Chaucer, Blind Harry, and Douglas," he wrote, "had any plan or intention of writing verses of five iambic feet, or a short and a long syllable placed alternately, appears as unlikely as that a modern musician should compose a piece of music in which the bars should uniformly consist of five crotchets." Why it should have been more unlikely for Chaucer to have followed this course than the poets of his own time, he neglected to mention. It is in the following passage that Sibbald's idea of the method pursued by these writers is indicated. It is worth quoting, because it does not differ essentially from much that appeared on the subject for at least fifty years after the death of Tyrwhitt. "It is necessary to remark," he most unnecessarily remarked, "that in many of the ancient Scottish as well as English poems, where the lines in general contain ten syllables, the measure does not, as in modern poetry, depend upon the division of the lines into a fixed number of feet. In the poems alluded to, the number frequently varies; and the syllables do not follow in order according to the modern rhythm of a short and a long syllable alternately, or of a long and two short, repeated. The measure seems rather to be regulated by the division of the time required for

recitation of the line into portions like musical phrases; not necessarily equal in the number of syllables, but requiring an equal period of time for their pronunciation.”<sup>1</sup>

Views of this same general character were held occasionally by men of eminence. Chaucer was, for instance, one of the favorite authors of Southey, and was read by him constantly. It is a tribute to the ineradicable vitality of his poetry, that, read as it must have been, it continued to seem poetical. For his admirer had no sympathy with any system of scansion which would make the elder poet's verse regular. In the privacy of friendship he unbosomed himself on this point with that full assurance which limited knowledge alone can inspire. He incidentally referred to the subject in a letter written to a friend in 1803, in which he discussed, among other matters, Scott's ‘Border Ballads.’ “Scott, it seems,” he wrote, “adopts the same system of metre with me, and varies his tune in the same stanza from iambic to anapaestic *ad libitum*. In spite of all the trouble that has been taken to torture Chaucer into heroic metre, I have no doubt whatever that he wrote upon this system common to all the ballad writers. Coleridge agrees with me upon this. The proof is that, read him thus, and he becomes everywhere harmonious; but expletive syllables, *en*'s and *y*'s and *e*'s, only make him halt upon ten lame toes. I am daily drinking at that pure well of English unde-

<sup>1</sup> *Chronicle of Scottish Poetry*, James Sibbald, vol. iv., pp. liv. from the *Thirteenth Century to* and xlv. *the Union of the Crowns.* By

filed, to get historical manners, and to learn English and poetry.”<sup>1</sup>

Even a cursory examination of the ryme, had he taken the trouble to make it, would have sufficed to show Southey the untenability of this position. He never chose to make it. The views here expressed he continued to hold down to the time of his death. He put forth no public profession of them, however, so far as I have observed, until towards the end of his life. Then it seemed to him that his belief had been established beyond question by the arguments of Dr. George Frederick Nott. This gentleman, in the year 1815, succeeded in putting the petty poetical pieces of Surrey and Wyatt in two volumes, containing about eighteen hundred quarto pages. To the first of these he prefixed a dissertation in which he discussed in a very prosy way the subject of English poetry before the sixteenth century. In general it may be said of both his volumes that the text sinks into insignificance beside the commentary of all sorts which precedes it and attends it and follows it. Nott had the genuine biographical spirit. He set out to show that it was to Surrey and not to Chaucer that English literature was indebted for its metrical versification and the general refinement of its poetic diction. The composition of the former author was more correct than that of the latter; he was freer from his prolixity and diffuseness; he had greater skill in the embellishment of his thoughts; he could imitate and translate with more spirit and originality. The

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Correspondence of Robert Southey*, vol. ii., p. 212.

bulky work of Nott requires here nothing but notice ; it does not demand a reply. He was very likely a painstaking, industrious student ; but no careful critical estimate of what he did in these two volumes can reach any other result than that of giving him a place among those scholars who owe what reputation they possess to the ability they have displayed in producing a series of inconclusive researches upon unimportant subjects. The difficulty is not to answer his arguments, but to find them. He sets out to confute Tyrwhitt by the simple expedients of saying that certain things appeared incredible to him ; that certain other things remained to be proved, and that, in particular, he could not believe that Chaucer would have made frequent use of the final *e*, because the object of the poet was to polish the language, and if he had done this, he would have made it seem more rude and antiquated than it really was. The only thing, indeed, which could be regarded as really supporting his position was a quotation from remarks upon English versification made in 1575 by Gascoigne. From the tenor of these Nott insisted that the view he expressed was the view entertained by an author who had flourished more than two hundred years before. The meaning of the two writers was not quite the same. Even had it been precisely the same, it is hard to see how it could have established the truth of his proposition. The ignorance of one man does not become knowledge when corroborated by the ignorance of another ; though it may be conceded that this sort of cumulative testimony has weight with many, and to some seems absolutely convincing.



It required, indeed, previous belief in a man of Southey's ability to fancy that Nott had added anything to the question that was new, or removed anything that was false. There was, however, little limit to his capacity to accept anything that coincided with his prepossessions. In a volume which he edited in 1831 he declared unhesitatingly that it was certain that Chaucer's verse was written rhythmically rather than metrically. This strong expression of opinion he withdrew, nevertheless, in the preface to the work in deference to the opposing opinion of his old schoolmate, James Boswell the younger. He admitted that the matter was in dispute, though he added that to his own mind Dr. Nott had proved the fact beyond question. He recurred to the subject a few years later in his *Life of Cowper*. One chapter of that work is given up to a sketch of English poetry from the time of Chaucer downward. It is made interesting by its style, its partialities, dislikes, prejudices, and especially by the general wrath exhibited in it towards French authors and France. The criticism contained in it will frequently startle the reader. It is the statements of fact, however, that will confound him. They will confound him not so much because they are erroneous, as that Southey should have been ignorant that they were erroneous. He tells us, quite as a matter of course, that Davenant was a poet of higher grade than Dryden; that alliterative verse became obsolete almost as soon as 'Piers Ploughman's Visions' had been composed in it; that Chaucer adopted the seven-line stanza of 'Troilus and Cressida' from the Provençal poets; that in the composition of the ten-

syllable couplet he had been shown the way by Richard Rolle, the hermit of Hampole; that Ben Jonson was one of the two authors by whom the so-called metaphysical style of poetry was brought into vogue, Donne being the other; that the well-known line in Dryden's characterization of Settle's poetry, that

"If it rhymed and rattled, all was well,"

was written of Blackmore; and that 'Blair's Grave' was the only poem that had been composed in imitation of Young's 'Night Thoughts,' both works having been contemporaneous in appearance. These are not all the novel facts that can be found in this one chapter; but these will do. After reading it one feels a certain respect for Southey's courage in censuring Dryden for his carelessness and inaccuracy whenever he touched upon the history of his art. The charge was true; but under the circumstances his were hardly the lips from which it could appropriately come.

The opinions of a man capable of making blunders of this sort in matters directly within his own province are not likely to carry much weight when delivered on matters entirely out of his province. Still, it is to be said for Southey that on the particular subject now under discussion he expressed himself in this work with a degree of caution which showed that he had either lost something of his former confidence in his views, or something of his former courage in their utterance. "It is a disputed question," he wrote here, "whether Chaucer's verses be rhythmical or metrical. I believe them to have been written rhythmically, upon the same princi-

ple on which Coleridge composed his beautiful fragment of 'Christabel'—that the number of *beats* or accentuated syllables in every line should be the same, although the number of syllables themselves might vary. Verse so composed will often be strictly metrical; and because Chaucer's is frequently so, the argument has been raised that it is always so if it be read properly, according to the intention of the author. But to suppose that it was written as iambic verse, and that the lines were lengthened or shortened to the required measure by sometimes pronouncing a final syllable, and sometimes letting it remain mute, according to the occasion, is supposing that Chaucer took greater liberties with the common pronunciation (which must always be uniform), and relied more on the judgment of the reader, than one who so perfectly understood the character of his mother tongue, and was so well acquainted with the ordinary capacities of men, can be supposed to have done, without impeachment of his sagacity."

I have given a good deal of space to the opinions expressed by Southey, partly because they were, according to his authority, the opinions also of a man of genius, like Coleridge; partly because they were the last utterances that are in any way authoritative of a view that was held with difficulty then by any one claiming to be a scholar, and with the progress of knowledge can no longer be held at all. There was, it must be conceded, some sort of justification for the hostility shown to the belief generally entertained. The final *e* in particular, as it was found in the printed texts, was too capricious in its appearance and disappearance to be regarded as satis-

factorily representing any grammatical termination existing in the ancient tongue. This vowel had been lifted into special prominence as fuller knowledge was gained of the changes that had taken place in the development of the early speech. Grammatically considered, it had become the most important letter in the alphabet. In Chaucer's time the vowels *a*, *o*, and *u* of the original inflections had been weakened into *e*. The final *n* also, wherever it existed in those terminations, had been largely dropped. Thus the noun *oxa* had become *oxe*; the infinitive *tellan* had become *tellen*, and full as often exhibited the form *telle* in the transition it was making to the form it now has. In consequence of these changes the final *e* had practically come to be the representative of the vast majority of the original endings. The study of it, therefore, was essentially the study of the grammar of the fourteenth century. Until the publication of the Harleian text no investigation could be undertaken with any certainty of arriving at even approximately correct conclusions. Herein lay the main difficulty that stood in the path of Gesenius, who made a special examination of the language of Chaucer as the subject of the dissertation he presented for his doctor's degree at the University of Bonn.<sup>1</sup> This appeared in 1847. It was a most creditable piece of work for the time, whether all its conclusions be accepted or not. As Tyrwhitt's text, however, was the linguistic basis

<sup>1</sup> *De Lingua Chauceri*. Dissertatio Grammatica quam ad summos in philosophia honores ab amplissimo philosophorum ordine in universitate Fridericia Guilelmia Rhenana rite impetrandos scripsit et una cum sententiis controversis die vii mens. Augusti a. MDCCCXLvii publice defendet Fridericus Guilelmus Gesenius, Halensis.



upon which it rested, the superstructure could not but be affected by the insecurity of the foundation. No trustworthy conclusions could be drawn from that source as to the use by the poet of the final *e*. The treatment of this termination, especially by the later scribes, had been arbitrary in the extreme. By many of them it was apparently added or dropped at pleasure. It presents itself often where it has no linguistic or metrical business; it is equally true that it frequently does not put in an appearance where it is necessary both to grammar and verse. Even as early as the fourteenth century it was undoubtedly beginning to show signs of that entire passing away from pronunciation and partial passing away from spelling which in no remote period were to overtake it. To what an extent this disappearance had taken place in Chaucer's time could only be ascertained by the study of the earliest manuscripts, and by a comparison in this matter of several of the best.

So far as this work could be done, it was done by Professor Child of Harvard University. It was in June, 1862, that he communicated to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences his 'Observations upon the Language of Chaucer' based upon the Harleian manuscript. His paper was subsequently printed in the memoirs of that body.<sup>1</sup> This was the most careful as well as the most exhaustive investigation that had up to this time

<sup>1</sup> *New Series*, vol. viii., p. 445. A supplement to the 'Observations on the Language of Chaucer' appeared in the 'Observations on the Language of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*,' based on Pauli's edition. This was communicated Jan. 9, 1866, and published in the 'Memoirs of the American Academy,' vol. ix., part ii., 1873, p. 265.



ever been applied to the grammar of any English classic. The present knowledge of the speech of the fourteenth century may be said to date its beginning from the publication of this essay. The results of the investigation embodied in it enable us in many cases to decide with confidence between various readings, and show oftentimes that some particular form of a word or some particular wording of a line could not well have come from the poet himself. Absolute trust, indeed, could not be placed in any one manuscript, however excellent, unless it were in the author's own handwriting, or had at least been subjected to his revision. Still, there were many points about which a reasonable degree of certainty could be obtained by an examination which was conducted on even this necessarily limited scale. One of these, which it may be said to have settled satisfactorily, may be cited as an illustration of the character of the work accomplished. In three of the manuscripts of the 'Legend of Good Women'—one of which has been adopted as the standard in most modern editions—the first two lines read as follows:

"A thousande tymes I have herd telle  
That there is joy in heven and payne in helle."

As they appear in this form we encounter a difficulty. Either the measure must be sacrificed in the first line, or an *e* must be appended to *herde*. Editors, as a general rule, have adopted the latter course. But the addition of this vowel to the past participle of a weak verb, such as *hear*, contravened the conclusions that followed from the examination of the Harleian text.

The early language did not admit of such a termination under such circumstances. There seemed to be no reason why the language of the fourteenth century should have come into the possession of it. On the strength of this investigation it was safe to say that it did not. Had we, therefore, been confined to these three manuscripts, we should have had to take our choice in the reading of this line between bad grammar and bad metre. Out of this dilemma the remaining six manuscripts—and, it may be added, the much-derided sixteenth-century editions—rescue us without difficulty. They all read, with unimportant variations,

“A thousand tymes have I herd men telle,  
That there is joy in heven and peyne in helle.”

Grammar and metre both unite to confirm in this case the correctness of the conclusions that had been reached from the examination of another and entirely different work. This investigation, therefore, put our knowledge of the forms of Chaucer's words and of the inflections he used upon as satisfactory a basis as could be done with but one text at command. From the day of its appearance to the present time it has been the original storehouse from which has been drawn most of the information contained in the various publications that have set out to give the student a view of the grammatical forms employed by the poet.

Still, this investigation was based upon a single text. Though it was limited to that, its maker felt that it would yield results of value. But on many points it could not give certain results. To secure that a com-

parison of several excellent manuscripts was necessary. Only in such a way could questions be settled decisively which the study of a single one could do no more than leave in doubt. It was, therefore, a matter of the first importance that a number of the best early texts should be made accessible to the students of the poet's language. Largely in consequence of the representations to this effect of Professor Child, the Chaucer Society was founded in 1867, by Mr. Furnivall, for the express purpose of furnishing scholars with material of this nature that lay hid in libraries, private or public. It is not possible to speak in terms of too high praise of the work this society has performed, ill supported as it has been. Here can be given only the barest summary of the most important things accomplished by it. Of the 'Canterbury Tales,' there are about fifty manuscripts of varying value known to be extant. Six of the best of them have been printed in parallel columns. Three of these six came from private libraries, whose owners generously allowed them to be printed. These are respectively the Ellesmere, belonging to Lord Ellesmere; the Hengwrt, belonging to Mr. Wm. W. E. Wynne, of Peniarth; and the Petworth, belonging to Lord Leconfield. From each of the great collections at Oxford, Cambridge, and the British Museum one was taken. These made up the other three from the public libraries. Later the Harleian manuscript of the British Museum, originally edited by Wright for the Percy Society, was reprinted. Of the ten or dozen manuscripts of 'Troilus and Cressida' three have been printed in parallel columns. One of these is the Campsall manuscript, copied

for Henry V. while Prince of Wales. It therefore must have been written before 1513. Another manuscript of this poem was also printed. It was included in the publication which contained the exhaustive comparison made by Rossetti of Chaucer's work with Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. Of the minor pieces there have been printed all the manuscripts that could be obtained, whether good or bad. This is but a partial account of what the society has attempted and performed. While its value is recognized by all competent to judge, it will not be adequately appreciated until the material it has furnished for investigation has been subjected to systematic study and analysis. But it does not require us to wait for that time to see that a great work has been done in honor of the poet, which has been as nobly accomplished as it was generously undertaken.

One result of the existence of the Chaucer Society has been the great impulse which has been given to the study of the poet's text. Since the appearance of its successive publications a vast amount of labor has been expended in this direction. Editions of his writings in whole or in part have come and are still coming rapidly from the press. There is, perhaps, hardly one of them not worth consulting, and many of them are of the highest value. It does not enter into the scope of this chapter to describe them, still less to express an opinion upon their relative merits, but merely to call attention to their appearance and character as evidence of the widespread and intelligent effort that is now put forth to illustrate the works and advance the knowledge of the first great English poet. Valuable, however, as



are the various investigations that have been completed or are in process of completion, great as is the light which has been thrown upon points previously obscure, there still remains to be made a comparison of the various manuscripts, after the exhaustive manner in which Professor Child has set the example. With all that has been done for the establishment of the text, much still remains to be achieved before the requirements of the exactest scholarship can be fully met.

There is one point also connected with the improvement of the text of Chaucer which, while not of supreme importance, deserves some consideration. This is its punctuation. A judicious revision will, in several instances, add much to its clearness, and in a few cases will restore the right sense. No one who is familiar with the manuscripts needs to be told that in them there is nothing that can be called punctuation at all, unless, indeed, the mark that goes under the name of a scratch-comma is entitled to be so classed. It is not so well known, however, that in this respect their example was largely followed in the earliest printed folios. The period is the principal point that the first editors contributed to the punctuation of Chaucer's writings. Nor with it were they any too liberal. It was usually limited to the conclusion of a paragraph. Even there it was only found occasionally. Now and then an interrogation-point made its appearance also. Commas are to be met with more frequently, but they are confined to the middle of lines. If they ever occur at the end—which is doubtful—the usage is exceptional. This practically continued to be the condition of things in the editions



that came out until the beginning of the seventeenth century. Changes had indeed taken place previous to that time. Each succeeding folio added a little to these helps to easy comprehension; but in every case it was very little. It was not till Speght's second edition of 1602 that a systematic attempt was carried out to furnish the writings of Chaucer with thorough punctuation. It was fairly well performed. The variations from it that have come into general acceptance since have not been very numerous. In fact, what was then adopted has been substantially retained in all editions to the present time.

It is clear, however, from this survey that there is nothing sacred about the present punctuation. For it the copyist of the manuscript is not responsible, still less the poet. It is the work of men who had no more means of ascertaining its propriety than we have at present. It would therefore be strange if the meaning were not sometimes missed or perverted. It is certain that it is sometimes obscured. This last result can be illustrated by citing a passage in the general prologue which has been variously pointed. It occurs in the description of the begging friar, and in modern editions reads, with insignificant variations, as follows:

“And overal, ther as profit sholde aryse,  
Curteys he was and lowly of servyse.  
There nas no man nowher so vertuous.  
He was the beste beggere in his hous;  
For thogh a widwe hadde noght a sho,  
So plesaunt was his In principio,  
Yet wolde he have a ferthing er he wente.”

It is in the third line that the misleading character of the punctuation manifests itself. Virtue, in its ordinary modern sense, is not the quality for which Chaucer represents the friar as pre-eminently distinguished. In fact, it is the one for which he is not distinguished. "Virtuous," in this passage, is the tribute paid to his efficiency in collecting contributions. It describes the skill he displayed in begging, and the success that attended his efforts. The poet goes on to celebrate the ability exhibited by the friar in this direction. Though a widow should be so poor as to be compelled to go barefoot, yet such was the persuasiveness of his manner that, before he left her, he would induce her to bestow upon him a farthing. But the closing of the third line of the extract with a period conveys the impression, to one not carefully heeding the context, that the person characterized was virtuous as the word is now generally understood. The punctuation is, therefore, calculated to lead to misapprehension. The early editors, following their usual custom, had no point whatever at the end of this line. A comma appeared in that of 1602. This continued to be employed in all subsequent editions until that of Morell in 1737. For it he substituted a semicolon. It was Tyrwhitt who first introduced the full stop, and this practice has been followed in all editions since his time. No one can read the passage carefully without coming to the conclusion that Morell's pointing is the most proper one, if not the only proper one.

Let us take a far more doubtful case, in which all subsequent editions agree in following the punctuation which first appeared in the edition of 1602. In the

Knight's tale the narrator, after reciting the grief that followed the death and burial of Arcite, passed on to a new subject in the following lines:

“ By processe and by lengthe of certeyn yeres  
Al stinted is the moorning and the teres  
Of Grekes, by oon general assent.  
Than semed me ther was a parlement  
At Athenes, upon certeyn poynts and cas;  
Among the whiche poynts yspoken was  
To have with certeyn contrees alliaunce,  
And have fully of Thebans obeisaunce.”

Here, accordingly, the statement is made that, after certain years had gone by, there was a general agreement made among the Greeks to cease their mourning and tears for the death of the fallen hero. This may be the right interpretation. But it surely does not represent a condition of things which can be ordinarily found occurring in life. All difficulty of this nature would be avoided by placing the period, not after “assent,” but either after “teres” or “Grekes,” preferably the latter. This, with the other changes involved, would give to the passage the meaning that after the lapse of certain years there was a general agreement, not to stop mourning, but to hold a parliament to discuss the political situation. Such a reading gives a natural and perfectly satisfactory interpretation to the passage. The other one was perhaps adopted out of deference to the Italian original.<sup>1</sup> But from the ideas contained in that, there would seem to have been intentional deviation on the

<sup>1</sup> *La Teseide*, xii., 3.

part of Chaucer. The Italian work mentions days as passed and not years. It has no allusion to the summoning of a parliament for the purpose of considering questions of peace and war. These are the alterations and additions made by the English poet. They are of sufficient extent and importance to free us from the necessity of compelling the text to conform in any particular to its original, if a better sense can be secured by a legitimate change.

Here two instances have been selected, in one of which the alteration of the present punctuation would not be likely to meet with any opposition; in the other it would be favored or opposed in accordance with the interpretation given to the passage. There are several other places which could be pointed out where the text in this respect needs careful examination. Yet it is right to say that, while such exist, they are not numerous. Chaucer's style is so clear that it does not so much require labor to ascertain the sense as to miss it. Hence the proper pointing of his lines was never a matter of much difficulty. There was not one of the poems where the work was done so poorly as in the 'Romance of the Rose.' For the neglect it has received in this particular there is no justification, whether the existing translation be attributed to the poet or not. In general it may be said that, while a proper revision of the punctuation would not make many changes, it would contribute its share towards the perfection of the text. For that purpose the humblest as well as the weightiest agencies are entitled to their due consideration.

One other point remains to be noted. Unless all lit-

erary traditions are to be falsified, there is still a stage through which the editing of the text of Chaucer is to pass. No student of the poet's writings needs now to be told that the art of versification was an art in which he was supremely interested, and to which he gave the most careful study. The result is that he became one of the greatest masters of melody that our literature has on its rolls. But such was not the belief of the past, not even of a very recent past. The homeliness of his diction and the ruggedness of his versification were matters upon which the eighteenth century in particular had made up its mind definitely. The ignorant criticism to which it gave birth in consequence does not fail even now to make its appearance occasionally. But it is no longer deemed of sufficient importance to merit so much of consideration as is implied in correction. On the contrary, so well established is the doctrine of Chaucer's consummate mastery of melody that any poem badly deficient in this respect would be rejected unhesitatingly on that account alone, or the manuscript containing it would at once be pronounced corrupt. This complete change of opinion is unquestionably warranted by the facts. But in such a matter there is always danger of going too far. All students of Shakspeare are well aware how his verses were patched up by his commentators during the last century; how words were added or discarded to bring the lines into absolute consistency with that correct taste which could not tolerate the slightest deviation from formal regularity. For there are men who, neither in language nor in literature, can be satisfied with perfect propriety. They insist upon what may



be termed pluperfect propriety. The text of Chaucer is fairly certain to undergo in the immediate future assaults of this character upon its integrity. Words of the editor will be substituted for words of the poet because they are supposed to make better rymes or better measure or better sense. Lines will be made to conform to an exactly uniform pattern. Neither redundancies nor deficiencies will be tolerated. No peculiarities of this nature will be conceded to exist in the work as it came from the hand of the writer himself. Every shortcoming, real or fancied, will be fathered upon the already heavily burdened Adam Scrivener, who will be held to the same responsibility for the occurrence of these in all manuscripts as the original Adam has been held accountable for the sins of all his descendants. This method of proceeding will be defended in every case, because in many cases there is no doubt that it is the proper method. Variations in the texts that have been handed down show that correction of the lines not only can, but must often, be made in the interests of regularity and melody. But the temptation is always liable to beset the editor to insist upon a perfection in Chaucer's verses at which he never aimed himself, and which in numerous instances would not have seemed to him perfection. It is vain to hope that he will not yield to it now and then. There will be times when the most conservative of commentators will succumb to the rage for emendation that occasionally runs riot in the veins of us all.

This evil will be a real evil while it lasts. But from the nature of things its influence will be comparatively short-lived. Experience has already made this fact evi-

dent. Even the few unauthorized changes that were made by a man of so exquisite literary taste as Tyrwhitt have been rejected in modern editions. The same fate will overtake most and probably all of those that are yet to be made, though they may meet with universal favor for a time. The outlook, indeed, for the perfection of the text of the larger portion of Chaucer's writings is in truth exceedingly promising. As a result of the work that is now going on, it is to be hoped, and perhaps to be presumed, that all obscurities and uncertainties in matters of grammar and versification will eventually be reduced to so few that their final clearing up will be rather an object of curiosity than of importance. We can, at any rate, feel confident that in the question of text there is no doubtful outlook for the student of literature pure and simple. Even if we are never to be absolutely sure of the precise form of the poet's words, we are certain to be reasonably sure of the words themselves. This to the majority of men will always be the supreme consideration. The task of accomplishing it is not one specially perplexing. The qualities that make Chaucer an easy author to understand make him in most instances an exceptionally easy one to edit. In the former respect he is like nearly all early writers. The difficulties that attend his comprehension are mainly external difficulties, not internal. They vanish quickly when once grappled with, even if grappled with feebly. They are largely limited to the unfamiliar look of an orthography now antiquated, and to unacquaintance with words and meanings of words now obsolete, and inflections and syntactical constructions that have failed to survive. These

are obstacles that are of force to deter men from taking up the study of the poet; they do not seriously delay the progress of the study when once undertaken. There are, on the other side, compensating advantages. Few of those doubtful passages exist, dear to the heart of the annotator, upon the interpretation of which men can exert unchecked the ingenuity or perversity of their intellects, in the conviction that if their explanation does not prove satisfactory to others, it can never be made to appear unsatisfactory to themselves. No condensation of thought, as in Shakspeare, interferes with the instantaneous perception of the idea the poet is seeking to convey. No involved constructions break in upon the current of the narrative which flows on with the equable movement of a mighty river. There are, indeed, scattered through the more than thirty thousand lines which make up Chaucer's poetry, riddles which it will long task ingenuity and special scholarship to solve satisfactorily. There are words in his writings the meanings of which have not yet passed the limits of conjecture. Tyrwhitt appended to his edition a list of fifty-three of these which he professed himself unable to define; and he failed to include several in regard to which he had elsewhere acknowledged his ignorance. His number has been diminished since his time, but it is still a good way from being extinguished.

But, besides the words, there are still unexplained references to customs that have been abandoned, to legends that have been forgotten, and to beliefs that have passed away. Some of these seem to have been not altogether clear to the men of the poet's own age. Others have had

time to sink into oblivion during the past three hundred years. Chaucer has twice occasion to speak of the story of Wade's boat. The tale was known in the sixteenth century. "Concerning Wade and his Boat, called Guingelot," said Speght in his glossary, "as also his strange exploits in the same: because the matter is long and fabulous, I pass it over." The information which the old editor disdained to communicate has been sought for anxiously by modern editors, but so far has been sought in vain. Of the class of references which must have been obscure to many of the poet's own time, the following famous night-spell in the Miller's tale is a remarkable example:

"Lord Jhesu Crist and Seynt Benedight,  
Blesse this hous from every wikkede wight:  
For nightes were the white Paternoster,  
Wher wonestow now, Seynt Petres soster."

This has not only defied all modern attempts at explanation, but it clearly puzzled the men of the past. The reading given above is but one of several. In the different manuscripts so far published it appears with variations, some of them materially affecting the sense. The right reading will never be ascertained with certainty until the progress of folk-lore has brought to light the superstitions once cherished about the white paternoster, and the belief prevalent in regard to a person who, in the popular opinion, had the distinction of being the sister of Saint Peter.

The life, too, of the fourteenth century, in all its phases, must be fully explored before we can hope to comprehend many of the allusions made by the poet, and in



some instances to feel assured that, with any given text, we are in possession of his precise words. The various prologues scattered throughout the 'Canterbury Tales,' and especially the general Prologue, offer numerous opportunities for special investigation, hardly one of which has yet been adequately improved. These touch, directly or indirectly, upon everything that men then thought or believed or did. In Chaucer the social life of England is pictured in little: it can never be satisfactorily explained save by him who has studied it in large. The meaning of the text after a fashion we know; its full meaning we do not know. But there is another side to the question. It is obvious that in many instances work must be done in the reverse order. The text itself can often not be settled with precision until we know with precision what it is the author is aiming to convey, or to what incident or story or saying he is making remote allusion. To the elucidation of points like these, aid must be brought from almost every field of research. Language, law, history will need to be called in to contribute to the desired end. The thoughts, the beliefs, the passions that swayed the hearts of men who lived and struggled in the stormy century in which the poet flourished, must be seen and studied, not only as exhibited in his own pages, but in those of the obscurest and dreariest of his contemporaries. The perfect knowledge which is the result of such investigation may in time come into the possession of every man who cares for it; but it will never be attained, in the first place, by the efforts of any one man, perhaps not of any one age. It will be the gathered harvest of many toilers working



in different fields and with entirely different ends in view. Literary objects may, perhaps, influence none of them. Few, comparatively, will be the number who will be seeking directly to illuminate the text of the poet; but, as the first great force in our literature, his words must be closely scanned by all students of the life of the age which his portraiture has made familiar. The light he has imparted will, in turn, be reflected upon his own pages. When these scattered agencies have yielded their full results, we may believe that the difficulties now existing will one by one disappear. Nor is it hopeless to expect that a text at last will be attained which the poet himself, could he see it, might recognize, even in minute particulars, as essentially his own; and might feel that the care and caution of later scholarship had largely repaired the injury wrought his work by the negligence and haste of the earlier scribes whom he denounced.



IV.

THE WRITINGS OF CHAUCER



## THE WRITINGS OF CHAUCER

### I.

THE age of manuscript, which was apt to be fatal to all of the writings of some authors, was sure to be fatal to some of the writings of all authors. He who was not appreciated and admired by his contemporaries stood little chance of having his compositions preserved, when their preservation was due to the slow work of the scribe. The demand for books was necessarily limited at a time when but few could read ; but the means of supplying the demand were more limited still. [Even in the case of the most popular authors, the lighter pieces would inevitably be reproduced far less often than the great works upon which their reputation was mainly built.] But of neither would there be many copies in existence, and countless agencies would be always in operation threatening with destruction the few that were. It is in the highest degree improbable that we have the complete production of a single author who flourished before the invention of printing.

Chaucer certainly has not escaped the common fate. We know that some of his pieces have been lost, for he has himself left us a record of their titles; and it is reasonable to infer from his mention of them that they were works of some length, if not of much value. But



there are others that have perished of which we have no definite memorial. No small proportion of his shortest pieces must have failed to reach later times. That such once existed, and existed in great numbers, we learn from several sources, and all of them of the highest authority. In the prologue to the 'Legend of Good Women,' Alcestris is represented as pleading in the poet's behalf to the God of Love that he had written

"Many an hymnè for your holidays,  
That highten ballades, roundels, virelays."

So, likewise, in the so-called Retractation at the end of the 'Canterbury Tales,' Chaucer is made to deplore the composition of "many a song and many a lecherous lay." Lydgate, also, in the prologue to his translation of Boccaccio's work on the 'Fall of Princes,' bears witness to the existence and abundance of these same productions. "This said poet, my master," he wrote,

"Made and composed full many a fresh ditty,  
Complaints, ballades, roundels, virelays,  
Full delectable to hearken and to see."

Gower's evidence on this point has already been quoted. The Goddess of Love, in the message she sends to Chaucer, speaks of the ditties and the glad songs which in his youth he had written for her sake, and adds that the land was filled full of them everywhere.<sup>1</sup> This is contemporary evidence that cannot be disputed. It points unmistakably to the existence of a large body

<sup>1</sup> See page 44.

of minor poetry that dealt with the passion of love. These pieces have almost entirely disappeared. Few of the ballades, complaints, roundels, and virelays have come down to us; and several of these productions that have been preserved are not of an erotic character. Some love poems, most of them spurious or doubtful, long continued to be printed among Chaucer's works; but they were far from being numerous enough to fill any land, and if for any reason they deserve Gower's epithet of "glad," it is not because they are calculated to make their readers glad.

We might, indeed, have felt justified in believing that many short poems, treating of the passion of love, must have been produced, even if we did not have this positive testimony. Not simply would his own feelings have disposed Chaucer to occasional efforts of this kind, but in the courtly society with which he was connected his services would have been called into constant requisition to help in this way the halting speech of his friends and patrons. To this fact he appears to bear personal witness. At the opening of 'Troilus and Cressida,' he defines one position he held with sufficient exactness. He speaks of himself as

"I that God of Lovè's servants serve."

The natural method for him to be of use to the servants of the God of Love—for so in the language of that time professed suitors were designated—was to compose poems descriptive of the sufferings they were undergoing, or of the perfections of the mistresses to whom they were professing devotion. The practice of wooing by

verse has, of course, been common in all times; but it was, apparently, much more followed then than at present. The hero of the 'Death of Blanche' tells us how, after he had fallen in love with the heroine of the piece, he strove to write poems in her praise, and gives us a specimen of the first one he made. The lover, likewise in Gower's work, informs the confessor that he had often essayed to compose roundels, ballades, and virelays in honor of his mistress, and had sung them in hall and chamber, but yet had found himself never the better for his efforts—a result which may not seem so surprising to the reader of the 'Confessio Amantis' as it did to its hero.<sup>1</sup> It is obvious that to few would nature have granted the ability out of the many to whom she granted the desire to compose love-songs. Here, accordingly, was the opportunity of the poet. It is certainly no extravagant assumption that it was his power of producing pieces of this character that was likely to recommend Chaucer in his youth to the favor of many who were far above him in rank. In that case, the circulation of such poems would, in turn, contribute to the spread of his fame among his contemporaries. At any rate, we are sure of their existence, however they may have originated. Their disappearance has, to some extent, worked adversely to the general acceptance of his reputation in modern times. "The venerable father of English poetry," wrote Ritson, "had in his time penned 'many a song and many a lecherous lay,' of which we have infinitely more reason to regret the loss than he had in his old age to repent the composition."<sup>2</sup> We

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i., p. 134 (Pauli).

<sup>2</sup> *Ancient Songs*, p. xxxi.

are not the only sufferers, however, by the failure of these to reach posterity; the author's own popularity has suffered also. This would be true, even if we concede what we can never know, that in most cases what has been preserved is superior in all respects to what has disappeared. To the vast body of readers poets must be known, if known beyond their names, by their shorter pieces. Some authors have been saved by them alone. There are several men, once very famous, who still maintain a good deal of reputation on the strength of a few verses, though the rest of their writings are never read save by professional students of literature.

In the case of Chaucer, unhappily, no work of his very great, and at the same time very short, has been preserved. The briefest of his minor pieces that are of high value extend to fifty or sixty lines at least, and even these are few in number. An exquisite poem of eight eight-line stanzas, the 'Former Age,' founded largely upon some lines of Boethius, has been recovered within the past few years. Two of his other shorter productions, the poetical epistles to Scogan and to Buxton, have humor, have satire, have, above all, personal references which give them peculiar interest. But in neither of them is there, to counterbalance its length, anything that lays hold of the heart and implants itself in the memory of successive generations of men. For that there is required an appeal to feelings more general in their nature. Such we probably should have had in some of the pieces referred to by Chaucer himself and his contemporaries in the passages quoted above; for

these dealt with the most universal of human passions. Scarcely a single one of them has been rescued from the wreck wrought by time. Three or four short ones have, indeed, been preserved by the fact of having been embodied in his larger works. Apparently one only has survived that was written independently. Love-verses there are, as has been said, which continued down to a late period to be printed among the poet's productions. But they are very few in number; and if they could be proved to be his composition, we should be spared the necessity of going any further than this fact to account for the ill-success in love of which Chaucer so persistently complains.

In lieu, therefore, of anything satisfactory from that quarter, admirers of Chaucer have been under the necessity of parading a short so-called moral poem as a remarkable exhibition of his powers. It has done duty in this way from a very early period. English anthologies almost invariably contain it which in their selections go as far back as the fourteenth century. Its title is given differently in different places, but it can always be recognized by its opening words, "Flee from the press." There can be no doubt that the poem embodies some excellent advice on the advisability of leading a life of discretion, of remaining contented with what one has, and of being resigned to what one will be called upon to endure. At least, it is good advice from the point of view of him who prefers the safety of the middle state to the risk of falling from the higher. The sentiments, indeed, are perfectly unexceptionable; it is only the claim of special excellence that is made



for the piece which calls for criticism. It is a good poem ; it is far from being a great one, even in the class to which it belongs. An interest, however, of a purely factitious nature was early given to it, and has contributed in no small degree to its repute. In two of the manuscripts in which it has been preserved, the assertion was made by the scribe that the poem was written by Chaucer on his death-bed. Since then the statement has been constantly repeated. Yet it is a statement of a kind to be received with suspicion, if not with absolute distrust. The composition of poems is naturally not a thing which even poets are inclined to concern themselves with in their dying hours. Yet if literary history is to be credited, or rather literary gossip, there have been a good many persons who have seized upon that particular opportunity to compose productions of more than ordinary merit. Especially has this been true of famous men while awaiting the infliction of the penalty of death. Usually the night before execution has been selected as the time for them to practise with the best results the writing of poetry. It is to those final moments that the composition of two or three of Raleigh's too few pieces has been attributed in various works. Montrose has been made responsible for the production, under similar circumstances, of a poem of eight lines. There is in his case this justification of its assignment to that specific time, that it must have been written in the interval between his capture and his execution. But all assertions of this nature, easily originated and carelessly accepted, may be safely set aside whenever not supported by positive

proof. There is nothing that can be deemed such in the case of this little piece of Chaucer's. The internal evidence, moreover, is as unsatisfactory as the external. The verses are, as they are sometimes styled, verses of good counsel; but there is nothing in them to make it worth while for the poet to have paused in that supreme hour from the thoughts and feelings natural to the situation in order to leave to the world a legacy of rather commonplace sentiment.

This poem has met here with a fuller notice than strictly belongs to it, because the undue praise it has received has tended to make it, in a measure, a representative illustration of Chaucer's poetic achievement. This in no sense it is. The distinction it has attained, however much or little, is due to the fact of its being almost the solitary survival which deserves consideration of the ruin that has overtaken Chaucer's shortest pieces. For the loss of these ballades, complaints, roundels, and virelays, compensation of a very doubtful sort has been generously supplied. Posterity has more than made up for the quantity of verse which the neglect of contemporaries or the accident of time has let go. For centuries no edition of the poet's works came out which was not swelled by accessions from every conceivable source, and of almost every conceivable kind of merit. The literary monument to Chaucer's memory, so far as it was represented by his collected writings, began in time to assume something of the nature of a cairn, upon which all who had the opportunity felt it a duty, or looked upon it as a pleasure, to cast a stone. It rose steadily, in consequence, to huger proportions. Every-

body interested in the man tried to furnish his offering from the material, no matter how rugged or ragged, which had drifted down from the past. Many of these contributions naturally added to the magnitude rather than to the impressiveness of the memorial. Works were attributed to the poet because they treated of the same general subject of which he was known to have treated. Others were assigned him because their titles were such as to suggest that they might be the productions which he had specifically mentioned. Others again, because they might be productions to which he himself, or some one of his contemporaries, was supposed to have alluded. Others, still, he received the credit or discredit of writing, because they chanced to be contained in a manuscript in which the scribe had copied some of his undoubtedly genuine productions. Finally, there seemed to grow up a disposition to make Chaucer responsible for all the early pieces floating about without an acknowledged author to which it appeared desirable for any reason to attach the name of a reputable begetter. Had he lived in an age when knowledge of every kind was handed down only by oral tradition, it is more than likely that he would have become a sort of general representative of ancient English poetry. All these agencies were sometimes operating together. The result was that, for a long period, successive editions of the poet's works kept increasing in quantity which bore little relation to quality. This process met with some protest in the sixteenth century; but it was not vigorous enough to be effective. It is but a little more than a hundred years ago that the business of separat-

ing the spurious matter from the genuine was taken seriously in hand. The task cannot yet be spoken of as having been satisfactorily accomplished, and perhaps never can be. All editions of Chaucer's works now published leave out a vast quantity of verse that once found place; but they still contain a great deal the genuineness of which is suspected or denied.

It is clear from what has been said that about the authorship of many of the productions imputed to the poet there has been, and still continues to be, controversy. Several grave questions come up at once as a consequence. How do we know that any specified work is Chaucer's own composition? How, again, do we know that it is not his? Can tests be devised so accurate that they cannot be gainsaid; so absolute that they cannot be deemed subject to variation at times, and, therefore, while true in general, liable to fail in their special application? If these questions cannot be answered in every instance with undeniable certainty, we are necessarily confronted with the questions which arise from this uncertainty. What are specifically to be considered the undoubted works of the poet? In the case of the doubtful ones, how clearly can we, in the conflict of opinion, distinguish between what is ascertained and what is maintained? To the student of literature these are matters far exceeding in importance and interest the consideration of the sources from which Chaucer's works may have been derived, or the possible or probable order in which they may have been written.

In the pages immediately following, I purpose to discuss the nature of the evidence that bears upon the au-



thenticity of Chaucer's writings, and the reasons which have induced his editors to attribute to him, or to withhold from him, works which go under his name; to set forth the tests by which the genuineness of any particular production must be tried; to give a fairly complete list of the pieces, whether large or small, which have been ascribed to him by various persons and at various times; to point out in this way the successive additions by which the volume of his verse has been swelled; to recount the story of the reverse process, through which poem after poem was struck from the catalogue of his writings; and, finally, to consider the claims made for or against the genuineness of certain works which still remain subjects of controversy. In a discussion of this kind, the question of tests naturally takes the precedence. Of the precise character of these, it is essential to have a clear and full understanding. It is likewise necessary to bear in mind something else, which is too frequently forgotten. Limitations, if such exist, upon the applicability of these tests must be carefully considered.

Evidence in regard to the genuineness or spuriousness of any particular work ascribed to the poet arranges itself under several heads. There is, first, the test of personal or contemporary testimony. Certain works have been declared by Chaucer to be productions of his own, or they have been attributed to him by men who flourished at the same period, and were well acquainted with him and his writings. We can hardly ask for any better evidence than this. Yet, valuable as it is, it is subject to one limitation. The fact that the poet asserts a work



with a certain title to be his does not establish beyond question the fact that the work handed down with this particular title is the one whose authorship he claimed. At the same time, the probabilities would be all that way. The burden of proof, accordingly, must rest not upon him who maintains the genuineness of such a production, but upon him who denies it.

Secondly, there is what may be called the manuscript test. To the pieces they copied the scribes were frequently in the habit of prefixing or appending the name of the author. It was not an invariable practice. No positive inference can therefore be drawn from their failure in any case to make a record of this sort. But the record, when made, does furnish testimony which must always be regarded as of importance. In particular, any assertion about Chaucer's authorship is entitled to consideration, because at the very latest it reaches us from a period following comparatively close upon his death. Of the value of this test in itself there can, consequently, be no question. Still, when we come to its application, its value in any given case will always be found to depend largely upon the character of the copyists for knowledge and accuracy. In these respects, as may be imagined, they varied widely. Some of them were capable of the grossest blunders. Pieces that the poet never wrote were ascribed to him by ignorant and blundering or careless scribes. Pieces that he did write were in like manner ascribed to other writers by these same gentry. Evidence from this source can therefore never have the weight which belongs to that found on the title-page of a printed volume; and there have been

instances when even that, certain as it seems, has turned out untrustworthy. Still, the ascription of a piece to Chaucer by a scribe is *prima facie* evidence that it was the poet's composition. Here, again, the burden of proof must fall upon him who denies the genuineness of the work.

The third test is that of grammar. The speech of the fourteenth century has well-defined characteristics of inflection and construction. These enable the student of language to tell with reasonable certainty whether a particular piece could have been produced within that period or not. If, therefore, a composition ascribed to the poet be found with the grammatical peculiarities, not of the fourteenth, but of the fifteenth or the sixteenth century, it is safe to infer that in the form handed down it could not have been his work. In most cases it is possible to go much further than this, and say that it could not have been his work in any form. The limitations upon this test are, to be sure, very marked. The text of an ancient writer is always liable to modernization. Corruptions creep in. New methods of expression are substituted for old. But there are always in an early production forms and phrases and grammatical peculiarities which cannot be modernized without vitiating the verse or destroying the sense. To features of this kind the scholar can appeal with confidence. If, in the places that are not susceptible to change, characteristics of the later speech show themselves, we can rest assured that the work does not belong to the earlier period to which it has been assigned. This is an eminently safe conclusion. For while it is practicable for

a later author to reproduce the language of the past, no one can possibly go about to anticipate the language of the future.

These three are absolute tests. Their force would be admitted unhesitatingly by every one. We come now to tests of another sort, which are based primarily upon the process of arguing from the known to the unknown. There are a number of works of Chaucer whose genuineness is admitted by all in consequence of the testimony to that effect furnished by the particular kinds of evidence that have just been specified. In them the use of a certain grammar appears; certain usages in the methods of ryming are observed; certain other practices in the connection of sentences and verses occur; and in general certain peculiarities of expression distinguish them throughout. On the other hand, certain other characteristics are not found in these undoubtedly genuine writings, though they perhaps exist in the works of Chaucer's contemporaries or even in those of his predecessors. The conclusion, therefore, is drawn that it is not reasonable to ascribe to him works which exhibit methods and usages he did not employ in the productions whose genuineness is certain, or which fail to conform to rules which in those productions he, to all appearances, religiously observed. The tests of this kind will fall under the following heads.

\*The first is the test of dialect. It is closely related to that of grammar, though, for reasons which will be given hereafter, it can never attain to the certainty of the latter. It is based upon the condition of the language during the period in which Chaucer flourished.

There was then no national standard of speech to which every one felt bound to conform. In particular, three great dialects prevailed in Britain from the Channel to the Forth. Each had peculiarities so marked that the distinction between them was then fully recognized, and is now clearly seen in the literary monuments that have been handed down. Chaucer wrote in the dialect of the East Midland counties. It differed in many respects from the tongue spoken south of the Thames, and in many from that spoken north of the Humber. If, therefore, a work ascribed to him is found characterized by the special peculiarities of these dialects—peculiarities not due to the scribe, but inherent in the very structure of the poem—the fact would be presumptive evidence against the genuineness of the production. This is a test, however, that from its very nature must be used with understanding and caution. A scribe that was brought up in the use of one dialect would be almost certain to introduce some of its forms, both of spelling and of grammar, into any composition he copied. Of this kind of procedure there are many illustrations. Among the nine manuscripts of the 'Legend of Good Women,' printed by the Chaucer Society, is a Scotch one from the Bodleian Library. As regards the literary character of its text it has no superior, and, one may perhaps add, hardly an equal. Its excellence in this respect stands in marked contrast to its linguistic deficiencies. It abounds throughout in Northern forms, for which the poet himself was not in the slightest degree responsible. Still, not a line can be found in this transcript which could not be changed into the Midland



speech without affecting at all the integrity of the verse or the correctness of the ryme. It is in these two points alone that the dialectic test can itself be tested, and its value determined. For this reason its practical application is limited to poetry, and can never be extended with certainty to prose.

There is, secondly, the test of ryme. This has many subdivisions. Some of them have never been fully investigated; some of them are, perhaps, not worth investigating. The one, however, to which most attention has been directed is what is ordinarily called the *-ye* and *-y* test. This rests upon the assumption that certain words ending in *-ie* or *-ye* did not ryme in the undisputed writings of Chaucer with certain other words ending in *-i* or *-y*. Between the two terminations in each class there is no difference, the same word being spelled in the same manuscript sometimes in the one way and sometimes in the other. The *-ie* or *-ye* group was made up mainly of substantives derived from the French. In that tongue they had this same termination. Such words as *chivalrye*, *courtesie*, *envie*, *jelousye*, and *tirannye* may be taken as representative examples. To this group, also, belonged a few substantives from native sources, such as *eye*, *flye*, and *lie*; and a still smaller number of adjectives and adverbs, such as *drye*, *slye*, and *hye*, 'highly.' There are, besides, a good many verbal forms included. They are mainly to be found in the infinitive mood and in the present tense, though other parts of the verb are also represented. Examples can be seen in the words *dye*, *bye*, 'buy,' *crye*, *lie*, *multiplye*, *spy*, and the past participle *ywrye*, 'covered.'



The *-i* or *-y* group is made up mainly of adverbs ending in the termination *-ly*. To it belong also a few nouns of which *cry*, *enemy*, *mercy*, and *sty* are examples; a few adjectives, such as *hardy* and *worthy*; a few adverbs, such as *by* and *why*; the interjection *fy*; and last, though by no means least, the pronoun *I*. To these two groups it may be advisable to add here the consideration of a third. This consists of words that in the fourteenth century ended usually in *-e* or *-ee*, but in most instances have, in modern times, assumed the termination *-y*. They are almost all of French origin. Examples are *beautee*, *bountee*, *cite*, *contree*, *charitee*, *pite*, *vanite*, *decree*, and *degree*. This class also included a few nouns of native origin, such as *fee*, *glee*, *knee*, and *tree*; adjectives, such as *free*; verbs, such as *be*, *flee*, *see*, and *slee*, 'slay'; the interjection *parde*; and the forms of the personal pronouns that ended in *-e*, such as *me* and *he*. It is, of course, understood that in none of these cases has an attempt been made to make a complete list, though the most important and the most frequently recurring illustrations of the usage have been given.<sup>1</sup>

Chaucer appears never to ryme the words of this third group with those of either of the two others. But it is the distinction between the words of the first and of the second group that is held to furnish the most decisive testimony as to his production of works the genuineness of which is in dispute. For his course in this matter is exceptional rather than regular. Writers before him rymed with each other words belonging to

<sup>1</sup> These groups, and Chaucer's were first pointed out by Ten Brink practice in connection with them, in his *Chaucer-Studien*, page 22 ff.

these three groups ; writers living at the same time with him did it ; writers immediately following him did it ; but the doing of it was something which was studiously avoided both by himself and by Gower. Furthermore, his practice shows that he regarded words having these different endings as not coming within the class of allowable rymes. They are, in truth, sometimes placed in direct contrast. Illustration of the fact and proof of the distinction observed by him in usage can be seen by examining the two following verses, one of which is taken from 'Troilus and Cressida,' and the other from the Second Nun's tale. Before quoting them, it is important to notice that in the seven-line stanza there are three distinct rymes. The endings of the first and third lines correspond ; so do those of the second, fourth, and fifth ; and so again do those of the sixth and seventh. Chaucer's practice, therefore, is plainly revealed in these verses, which for this purpose it is desirable to reproduce in the ancient orthography :

"On peril of my lif, I shal nat lye,  
 Apollo hath me told it feithfully,  
 I have ek founden by astronomye,  
 By sort, and by augurye ek trewely,  
 And dar wel seye, the tyme is faste by,  
 That fir and flaumbe on al the toun shal sprede,  
 And thus shal Troie torne to asshen dede."

*Troilus and Cressida*, iv., 113-19.

"And whil the organs maden melodie,  
 To God allone in herte thus sang she :  
 'O Lord, my soule and eek my body gye  
 Unwemmed, lest that I confounded be ;'  
 And for His love that dyde upon a tree,

Every seconde or thridde day she faste,  
Ay bidding in hire orisons ful faste."

*Second Nun's Tale*, lines 134-40.

If any further proof were needed of the observance paid by the poet to this distinction, it can be seen in his treatment of *cry* when used as a noun or as a verb. In the former case it is spelled as now, and invariably rymes with words of the second group; in the latter it is spelled *crye*, and rymes as invariably with words of the first group. A distinction of this sort, regularly observed, can hardly be the result of chance.

Upon the facts here laid down the theory is based that there was a difference in the pronunciation of these endings, which was carefully regarded by those in the social circle to which men like Gower and Chaucer belonged, however much it may have been neglected or unrecognized elsewhere. Besides this, there are tests resting upon the recurrence of assonant rymes, and also of strange, and one might almost say of outlandish, rymes. In both of these it is assumed that the poet could not have indulged, as in his admittedly genuine works they do not appear. The inference is accordingly drawn that writings in which they do occur cannot have been his production. Neither one of these two points has received the full investigation it demands. They both yield, perhaps, in importance to the ryming tests, which rests remotely upon grammar. In Anglo-Saxon the preterite of the weak verb ended in *-de* or *-te*, its past participle in *-d* or *-t*. This was a distinction that had not died out in the fourteenth century, though the knowledge of it clearly came to be lost soon after, as is

evident from the spelling of the scribes. Its existence affected the versification. A past participle of a weak verb could not rhyme with the preterite of another weak verb; that is to say, for illustration, that the past participles *brought* and *esed* could not rhyme respectively with the preterites *soughte* and *plesede*. In a general way it may be asserted that verbal forms which grammatically ended in the vowel *-e*, such as the infinitive mood and the first person singular of the present tense, could not rhyme with forms that grammatically ended in a consonant, such as the preterite singular of the strong conjugation and the past participle of the weak. Rules of this kind were, it is contended, strictly observed by Chaucer in the works unquestionably genuine. It is therefore a fair conclusion that works in which they are not regarded cannot be his. Some of the violations might, it is true, be apparent rather than real. Some of them might be due to corruption of the text; it is hardly possible that all of them can be.

There is, thirdly, what, for lack of a better term, may be called the rhetorical test. It is based upon the recurrence of certain practices which the poet follows in the relation which the verses in the seven-line stanza bear to one another, and in his method of employing the rhyming couplet. In the former, there is almost invariably a full stop at the end of the stanza. The sense and the sentence end together; the latter is rarely carried over from one stanza to another. In the case of the couplet, the second line often does not conclude the sense. There is a tendency to run it over to the line following, and end the sentence with that. Certain

peculiarities of the poet's method of versification will be made clear by observing the construction of some of the couplets in the following passage from the speech of Saturn, in the Knight's tale :

" Mine is the ruin of the highè halls,  
The falling of the towers and of the walls  
Upon the miner or the carpentér.  
I slew Samsón in shaking the pillár.  
And minè be the maladiès cold,  
The darkè treason, and the castès<sup>1</sup> old ;  
My looking is the father of pestilénce.  
Now weep no more, I shall do diligénce  
That Palamon, that is thine owèn knight,  
Shall have his lady, as thou hast him hight."<sup>2</sup>

The use of the couplet, as exemplified particularly in the first three lines, is a marked characteristic of Chaucer. It occurs with so much frequency that the genuineness of a poem in which it is not found at all, or only found rarely, would, by that very fact, be open to suspicion.

There is, fourthly and finally, the test of vocabulary ; that is, the existence of a large number of words in the doubtful poems which do not appear in Chaucer's undoubtedly genuine works, which in some cases are not known to be recorded in any other writings until a long time after the poet himself flourished. I include this as a test, out of deference to the men who appeal to it as one, not out of much respect for the test itself. It

<sup>1</sup> Plots.

<sup>2</sup> Promised.



is, to be sure, not absolutely worthless; it is as near it as can be consonant with the justice of ascribing any value whatever to the evidence it furnishes. The vocabulary of no age has ever been recorded in full. That of a past age, in which the literary production was scanty, can only have been preserved in comparatively small part. Every great author has words which he uses but once. Gower and Chaucer have each several which are not employed by the other; but that is no evidence in either case that they were not in common use.

This comprises all the tests which can be regarded as entitled to any consideration. Some others have been suggested, but they are too uncertain to be worth the time spent in their explanation or discussion. One, however, has been designedly left out. It is the test which, to the individual admirer of the poet, will seem in most instances the weightiest of all. We say that a particular piece is or is not Chaucer's because we recognize, or fail to recognize, in it what belongs to him, and to him alone. There is a certain something in the work of every great writer that differentiates him from every one else. We can feel it, though we may not always be able to express it. Our conviction of the genuineness or spuriousness of a production ascribed to the poet is largely due to our recognition of that indefinable quality which we call his manner, which separates him from the rest, and which is as clearly and distinctly visible to the mental eye of those who know and appreciate him fully as his bodily presence, when seen alive, would have been apparent to the natural eye of friends, even had he been in the midst of millions. This

occupies the anomalous position of being both the strongest and the weakest test. It is strongest in the influence it exerts over the individual when he comes to make a decision for himself. It produces the profoundest conviction upon his own mind; but it is not a conviction that can be communicated to others by any process of reasoning. If it is accepted at all, it is accepted solely on the ground of authority. It is, therefore, when appeal is made to it, the weakest test in the influence it exerts. Justly so, too. The mental vision is never so acute as the bodily, and the latter sometimes confuses persons bearing a close resemblance. It is likewise possible for a disciple so to catch in some particular instance the tone of the master, to reproduce so closely his manner, that it is unsafe to decide, without other evidence, to which of the two the production in question is to be ascribed. But, outside of this possibility, the public never forgets what the admirer often never comes to learn, that there are times when genius has its weaknesses, that it can on occasion perpetrate inanities sufficient to show the common nature it shares with the dullest of us all. The badness of a poem can never be regarded as a final proof of its lack of genuineness, when strong evidence exists on the other side. Moreover, the excellence or inferiority of a work, if once advanced as a decisive reason for its acceptance or rejection, is in the nature of a claim by him so doing it to superior knowledge of the poet, and to superior appreciation of his poetry. This is a concession very grudgingly granted to any one, and is in danger of being revoked at any time. It is the kind of argument, also,

to which he who has no right to express any opinion whatever will resort more freely than he who has the fullest right; and though the man may show his want of taste by the taste he shows, still the fact remains that there is no final arbiter to whose decision he feels bound to submit. Dogmatic assertions, therefore, about the genuineness or spuriousness of works, based merely upon the ground of personal conviction, and reinforced by no other considerations, have the least possible weight with students of literature. These refuse to be convinced by mere expressions of belief, no matter how positively stated, because they have come to know that convictions of this sort have often been made the cover for the most preposterous beliefs.

Let us, consequently, go back to the tests which will be conceded by all to have a direct bearing upon this question. These belong, as has been pointed out, to classes essentially distinct. This fact has too frequently been overlooked. The difference between the two kinds must be kept steadily in view. The tests belonging to the first class are the only ones that can be deemed fully satisfactory. Those of the second class furnish corroboratory proof, but not conclusive. This corroboratory proof may be very strong, or it may be very weak, but it is never in itself absolutely final. Tests of the second class rest primarily, in fact, upon the following proposition. Certain methods of ryming, certain methods of construction, certain usages of language, found in the doubtful poems are not found in those admittedly genuine. Therefore, the former are not by Chaucer. This proposition, in turn, rests consequently upon

the further assumption that the poet started out, perfect in the use of a tongue up to that time little employed for literary purposes; and that during his career he never varied one jot or tittle from the lofty standard of correctness which he had adopted for himself at the outset. Men who flourished before him, or at the same time with him, violated occasionally rules which he observed; men after him did so constantly. Not so he; and in this matter of conforming to certain canons of versification, Gower is usually joined with him. Neither one of these poets, through ignorance at an early period, or inattention or indifference at any period, ever forsook for a moment the ways of linguistic virtue in which he had been brought up.

A theory which at the first glance looks so extravagant, not to say preposterous, as that Chaucer never varied in the practice of his art, is one, it might be supposed, that would be kept in the background. Its truth would be quietly assumed by its advocates, and would underlie all their conclusions. The theory itself, however, would not be made too conspicuous. Such, however, is not the case. On the contrary, the utterance of this opinion is outspoken, aggressive, even contemptuous. One scholar frankly tells us, as if utterly astounded, that "the puerile plea has been set up that Chaucer's practice of riming differed at different periods of his life!"<sup>1</sup> A man of sensitive soul, holding the view thus stigmatized, while contemplating without emotion the exclamation-point, might, perhaps, take exception to the epi-

<sup>1</sup> *Essays on Chaucer*, part v., p. 441 (Chaucer Society Publications).



thet "puerile"; and in discussions of this kind it must be conceded that there is usually provocation enough in nouns, without introducing adjectives. In truth, it seems almost like an insult to the reader's intelligence to confute the plea that Chaucer's practice might not have varied. Yet assertions of the kind just quoted seem to render such a course necessary. That poets change their methods of construction and versification at different periods is one of the most patent facts in literary history. It is, in many instances, not a matter that requires investigation to discover; it actually forces itself upon the attention. It is the variation in his methods of versification that is used constantly at the present day as a test to decide whether a particular play of Shakspeare belongs to the earlier or the later period of his dramatic career. We may or may not admit its adequacy; but even if we look upon it as insufficient, we do not ascribe to it puerility. Certainty of conclusion on such points can be reached, however, only in the case of authors the chronology of whose works is definitely known. An illustration from one of these is enough to put the point beyond dispute, and this particular one is of special weight, because it extends to characteristics of expression as well as of versification. Every English scholar who reads the first two verses of the hymn in Milton's 'Ode upon the Morning of Christ's Nativity' recognizes in them at once traces of the influence exerted by the writings of the so-called metaphysical school of poetry. The representation of Nature feeling that it was then no time for her to wanton with her lusty paramour, the Sun, and hiding her guilty



front with innocent snow, furnishes of itself the unmistakable mark of the peculiar taste that dominated, for a period, a part of our literature. But Milton was a man of too mighty genius to be long or to be much affected by the fondness for out-of-the-way conceits and far-fetched imagery that had become in his time a prevalent fashion. It mars, indeed, in only two or three places the perfection of the piece just mentioned, and that was written when he was but twenty-one years old. His after-productions show no trace of it at all. In the technicalities of his art, also, there is evidence that he, in a similar manner, worked himself out of loose practices in which he was at first inclined to indulge. In this same ode are found pronunciations and rymes which could not have been possible for him in the better work of his later years. It is a poem of less than two hundred and fifty lines; and yet there occur in it three instances of accentuation that remind the reader of the rugged verses of Donne. *Ocean* is made a word of three syllables, and rymes with *began*; *union* is put through the same process, and rymes with *alone*; and the third similar example is that of *session*, which rymes with *throne*. There is but one solitary later instance of this practice on Milton's part, and that is from every side more defensible. In 'Il Penseroso,' *contemplation* rymes with *throne*. There are several other places in this comparatively short piece in which the accent is placed upon a syllable where it does not regularly belong. *Harbinger* rymes with *sphere*, *influence* with *thence*, *festival* with *hall*, and *serviceable* with *stable*. This crabbed method of versification, this forcing the pronunciation

to accommodate itself to the ryme, and not accommodating the ryme to the pronunciation, was far from uncommon in that century. Its use by Milton, and his subsequent disuse of it, show that it was a habit into which he at first had fallen and had then deliberately abandoned. Laxities of the sort just specified became offensive to his ear as he grew in the knowledge of his art and acquired skill in the management of his verse. He came to feel that the liberties which the inferior poets of his age allowed themselves were not liberty, but license. He wrote, to be sure, too little ryme to make the argument from his practice as strong as it would be, could the comparison have been made with a vast body of verse of that kind. It is strong enough, however, to prove that methods which he tolerated at one time, he came to look upon with disfavor at another ; and that therefore the plea, whether puerile or not in Chaucer's case, can be safely maintained in his, that his practice of ryming differed at different periods of his life.

The truth is that, while their general observance cannot be gainsaid, most, if not every one, of the tests of the second class break down when we take the position that it was not possible for Chaucer to violate them at all. Their real weight is consequently in danger of being disregarded, because there is attached to them a supposed sanctity which, like most sanctity, will not stand the strain of minute inspection. It may have been due to momentary lapse of attention ; it may have been due to the haste of composition ; it may have been due to deliberate choice ; it may have been due to the survival of linguistic influences to which he had once been ex-

posed, or of practices in which he had once indulged ; but, to whatever cause due, the fact cannot be disputed that there are occasional violations of all the inviolable tests which have been laid down as belonging to the second class. The violations are so few that they make Chaucer's general observance of these tests noteworthy. Their actual existence, however, demonstrates that at some period of his life he did not, on every occasion, attain to that lofty standard of linguistic purity which has sometimes been set up for him by modern scholars. It is not the first time in literary history that the poet has failed to come up to the requirements of his commentators.

Let us take up these tests in the order in which they have been set forth. There is first the one of dialect. In this, as in the others, there are degrees of importance. Necessarily the more distinguishing the character, the weightier will be the evidence furnished by its observance or non-observance. Now, there is no more marked distinction between the three dialects that were then in literary use in Great Britain than the inflection of the present tense of the verb. This variation is justly regarded as furnishing testimony that cannot be questioned as to the part of the island from which the author of any particular work came. Does a violation of this test of dialect not merely expose to suspicion the poem in which it occurs, but absolutely require its rejection? The latter alternative is often implied, if not directly asserted. It is therefore a matter of necessity to test this test. For this purpose let us place side by side the inflection of the singular number of the present tense as

shown in the East Midland speech in which Chaucer wrote and as shown in that of the North. Making use of the verb *tell*, we have exhibited the following differences:

## East Midland Dialect.

I       telle.  
Thou tellest.  
He     telleth.

## Northern Dialect.

I       tel.  
Thou telles.  
He     telles.

It will be observed that in the third person Modern English does not ordinarily follow its own more immediate progenitor, the East Midland speech, but the speech of the North instead. But this did not come about at a very early day. The distinguishing peculiarity of the Northern dialect was its use of this ending in *-s*. It was, indeed, employed by it in both numbers of the present tense. But this letter did not establish itself in the language of literature as the termination of the third person singular until the latter half of the sixteenth century. Up to that time the ending had been *-th*. This has, after a manner, been preserved for us by its invariable employment in the authorized version of the Bible. It is almost needless to say that it is the ending which Chaucer habitually uses. Apparent exceptions can, indeed, be sometimes found in particular manuscripts. But they are only apparent; they owe their existence to the carelessness of the scribe and not to the practice of the poet. His general avoidance of these Northern forms is made prominent by the care he takes to introduce them where they are appropriate. In the Reeve's tale two of the characters are students of

Cambridge, who come from a town "far in the North." These are very properly represented as using the termination in *-s*, as well as certain other peculiarities of the dialect of that region. But outside of this place not a genuine instance can be found of the employment of this ending in the 'Canterbury Tales.' The same assertion is true of the 'Legend of Good Women.' It is true also of all the poems that are universally conceded to have been written in the latter part of Chaucer's career as an author. Can such a statement be made of the poems written at a somewhat earlier period? The answer will be given in the following quotations:

"Suche a tempest gan to rise  
 That brak her maste and made it falle,  
 And clefte here ship and dreynt hem alle,  
 That never was founden, as it *telles*,  
 Borde ne man, ne nothyng elles."  
 'Death of Blanche,' 70-74.

"And I wol yeve hym al that *falles*  
 To a chambre, and al his halles  
 I wol do peynte with pure golde."  
 Ib. 257-259.

"For she desyred nothing elles  
 In certayne, as the boke us *telles*."  
 'House of Fame,' 425-6.

"Lo, these tydynges  
 That thou now hider *brynges*."  
 Ib. 1907-8.

In all these instances the ryme requires imperatively the Northern inflection in *-s*. For the appearance of



the termination no scribe can therefore be made responsible. It is the work of the poet and of him alone. There is, accordingly, no escape from the conclusion that Chaucer at one period of his life did not hesitate to resort to the peculiar forms of a dialect differing in a marked manner from the corresponding ones of the dialect in which he regularly wrote.

Far more unassailable is the *-ye* and *-y* test. There can be no question whatever as to the general observance of it on the part of the poet. It is maintained that not a single instance of its violation can be proved; for in every case of apparent deviation a defence has been, or can be, set up which satisfies the advocates of this view, even if it be not absolutely satisfactory in itself. Thus, in the tale of Sir Thopas, *chivalrye*, a word of the *-ye* group, rymes with the proper name *Gy*, a word of the *-y* group.<sup>1</sup> But as in this poem Chaucer was designedly ridiculing the literary methods of the versifiers of the metrical romances, the ground is taken that in imitating their words and expressions he would also imitate occasionally their peculiar rymes. Again, the adjective *sly* rymes regularly with the words of the *-ye* group; but in the prologue to the tale of the Canon's Yeoman it rymes with *hertely*, a word of the *-y* group.<sup>2</sup> The only explanation that can well be given for this is the difference of grammatical employment. In the particular case mentioned the adjective is used as a predicate in the singular. It might naturally therefore appear in the simple form ending in *-y*. But in the other instances it

<sup>1</sup> Lines 188 and 191.

<sup>2</sup> Lines 101-2.

is either in the plural, or is inflected according to the definite declension. In these, accordingly, a final *-e* would be added to the simple word. This explanation will not, indeed, explain the practice in the case of certain other adjectives, such, for example, as *dry*, which, whether used attributively or predicatively, ryme always with words of the *-ye* group. There is also difficulty with the substantive *sky*. In the one place in the 'Canterbury Tales' in which it is found at the end of a line, it rymes with *by*.<sup>1</sup> This makes it a word of the *-y* group. But in the 'House of Fame' it rymes with the adverb *hye*.<sup>2</sup> This would put it into the *-ye* group; for *hye* elsewhere in Chaucer is found ryming with such words as *remedye*, *eye*, and *crye*. The only possible way of accounting for this variation is that the word is used in different senses in the two passages. In the one case it has the meaning under which it now ordinarily goes; in the other it has the signification of 'cloud.' But even this refuge is denied if we take into consideration Gower's practice. He ordinarily rymes *sky* with words of the *-y* class, and in one instance certainly when it has this sense of 'cloud.'<sup>3</sup> As this author is constantly joined with Chaucer in the discussion of this particular test, it is proper to add that his observance of it is in general very strict. A few instances there are in which the only text at present accessible does not justify the maintenance of any positive view in the lack of satisfactory manuscript authority. There is one place, however,

<sup>1</sup> *Squire's tale*, l. 495.

<sup>2</sup> Lines 1599, 1600.

<sup>3</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, vol. ii., p. 50 (Pauli).

which deserves consideration. In the eighth book we have the two following ryming lines :

“ Which was her dedlich enemy,  
Through pure treson and envy.”<sup>1</sup>

If this reading is borne out by the manuscripts, we have *enemy*, a word of the *-y* group, ryming unmistakably with *envye*, a word of the *-ye* group.

While, therefore, no question can exist as to the general observance of the *-ye -y* test by the poet, there are a very few instances in which his regard for it is, to say the least, open to suspicion. Obviously, in a matter of this kind, it must be as true in metre as in mathematics that things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other. If not, the test ceases at once to be strictly enforced, and, in fact, loses its character of infallibility. Moreover, there are certain theoretical difficulties in the way of its application. At the outset we are confronted with a perplexing point which many, perhaps, find easy to comprehend, but none have so far found time to explain. If words with slightly different terminations do not ryme, it may be assumed as unquestionable that a marked difference of pronunciation is indicated. In the case, therefore, of these two particular endings we are considering, the view is generally taken that the distinction between them exists mainly in the fact that the former consists of two syllables and the latter of one ; that, for illustration, *roiially* and *jolitee* must be words of three syllables and *jelousye* one of four. So long as we

<sup>1</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, vol. iii., p. 320.

confine our attention to the end of the lines, there is no difficulty with this view. But the further fact appears that in the middle of the line the *-ye* ending does not form two appreciably distinct syllables; that the instances where it does are exceptional rather than the rule. Hence, in the application of this test we come across the peculiar condition of things that a principle which seems to be disregarded in the middle of a line exercises an arbitrary sway at the end.

Theoretical difficulties, however, can never outweigh the argument that is based upon an observance that is practically almost invariable. It is important here, therefore, to call attention to one further modification of this test, which will be interpreted differently, according to the difference of view of those who engage in the examination of this question. There are certain words in Chaucer that have double endings. With one termination they fall into one group of rymes, with the other into another group. This is especially common in the case of words which end in *-eye* or *-ey*, or sometimes in *-aye* or *-ay*. Take the noun *wey*, 'way,' and the adverb *away*, 'away,' as illustrations. They belong apparently to two different groups of words that never ryme. When they are spelled *wey* and *away*, they ryme with the words of a certain class. Give them, however, the spelling *weye* and *awaye*, and, without at all changing their signification or usage, they ryme with words of another class. Give them again the spelling *way* or *away*, they can be found occasionally ryming with words belonging to a still different group. Or again, take the substantive *remedye*. It sometimes appears in Chaucer

as just written and sometimes again as *remede*. I select it because in the latter form it is never used by him at the end of a line. If it did it would ryme with words of the third group, or its termination would constitute a feminine ryme. On the other hand, *remedye* does ryme several times with words of the *-ye* group. Now, what is possible in this instance but does not occur, actually does occur in other instances. *Chivachie*, 'a military expedition on horseback,' rymes with *Picardie* in the Prologue to the 'Canterbury Tales';<sup>1</sup> in the 'Complaint of Mars' it rymes with *be* and *see*.<sup>2</sup> But in the latter case it appears in nearly every manuscript not as *chivachie*, but as *chivache*. A similar statement can be made about *perrye*, a word meaning 'precious stones.' In the Knight's tale it rymes with *spicerye*.<sup>3</sup> This puts it at once into the *-ye* group. In the Monk's tale, however, it rymes with *degree* and *see* and *she*;<sup>4</sup> in the prologue to the Wife of Bath's tale, it rymes with *he*.<sup>5</sup> This brings it into the third group. Here again, in most of the manuscripts, the word has undergone a change of form; it is no longer spelled *perrye*, but *perree*.

Examples like these work both ways. To some they will demonstrate the soundness, to others the unsoundness, of this test. Alteration of form in accordance with the requirements of the ryme will indicate to one class of observers how sensitive the poet's ear must have been to difference of endings. On the other hand, the ability to change at will a word from one set of rymes to another by merely changing its termination will seem

<sup>1</sup> Line 85.    <sup>2</sup> Line 144.    <sup>3</sup> Line 2078.    <sup>4</sup> Line 370.    <sup>5</sup> Line 344.



to another class proof of the essential unreality of the distinction between these terminations, and that the observance of this so-called test was nothing more than a freak of fashion which held sway for a while and then died because, in the English language, at least, it had never had any real excuse for living. In such a case it would affect only the productions of the period during which it was in vogue. However this may be, the argument based upon the contrast of the two kinds of ryme, in the same stanza, cannot be regarded as decisive of the matter in question. There is no absolute certainty that contrast was in every instance designed. There are, in truth, stanzas of a precisely similar nature, in which it is so far from being preserved that it must have been deliberately discarded. The third and fourth verses of the fifth canto of 'Troilus and Cressida' are a case in point. They show conclusively that Chaucer reserved for himself a certain degree of liberty in the employment of the metrical forms he created. In these verses, it will be noticed that there are but two rymes instead of the usual three:

" Ful redy was at prime Dyomede  
Criseyde unto the Grekes host to lede,  
For sorwe of which she felte here herte blede,  
As she that nyste what was best to rede.  
And trewely as men in bokes rede,  
Men wiste never womman han the care,  
Ne was so loth out of a town to fare.

" This Troilus withouten reed or lore,  
As man that hath his joyes ek forlore,  
Was waytynge on his lady everemore,

As she that was the sothfast crop and more  
 Of al his lust or joyes here tofore.  
 But Troilus, farewel now al thi joye!  
 For shaltow nevere sen here eft in Troye."

Stanzas of this kind might be fairly set off against those previously produced to support the opposite view. Still, there can be no just ground for disputing Chaucer's almost perfect observance of the *-ye -y* test in the case of the works which are unquestionably of his own composition. There is hardly such a sense of security to be felt in the matter of assonant rymes. There his metrical virtue is not above suspicion; perhaps it would be proper to say that it is badly tainted. One instance occurs in the second book of 'Troilus and Cressida,' where *sike* rymes with *endite* and *white*.<sup>1</sup> Another is to be found in the poem on the 'Death of Blanche.' In it are the following lines, taken from the episode of Ceyx and Alcyone:

"This lady that was left at home,  
 Hath wonder that the king ne come  
 Home, for it was a longe terme,  
 Anon her herte began to yerne."

Here in the words *terme* and *yerne* is to all appearances satisfactory evidence as to the use of assonant rymes by the poet. It will doubtless surprise the reader to be informed that it is satisfactory evidence to the contrary. Yet this is a position that has been seriously taken and earnestly, if not strongly, defended. We are told that these lines, instead of showing what they seem unmis-

<sup>1</sup> ii., 884, 886, 887. Pointed out in Ten Brink's *Studien*, p. 14.

takably to show, furnish an instructive instance to prove that there are no assonant rymes in Chaucer at all. The fault is wholly in the scribe. *Yerne* is his mistake for *erme*, 'to grieve.' This only is the true form. It occurs also in the prologue to the Pardoner's tale, where it rymes with the same word *term*, though the latter is used in a different sense from that found in the passage just quoted.

No one familiar with the work of the scribe will be disposed to pay too much respect to his authority. There was hardly any sin of omission or commission of which he could not be guilty under proper provocation. But still he has a claim to be treated fairly. Unless we can show that the reading he furnishes us is wrong, we are bound to assume that the chances are in favor of its being right. The lines quoted do not accordingly seem so much an instructive instance of the scribe's carelessness as of the disposition to resort to the ancient, though far from antiquated, device of correcting facts when they are reprehensible enough not to adapt themselves to a preconceived theory. *Yerne* is the reading of the only two early authorities that contain this passage. Differing in many points, they agree here. The word makes a fitting and intelligible sense. The thought implied in it is, in fact, repeated a very few lines after, where it is said that Alcyone "*longed* so after the king" that her life became one of wretchedness. If, then, the existing term satisfies all the conditions that can fairly be demanded, it is contrary to every sound principle of critical emendation to disturb it because it fails to conform to some test the observance of which is the very point in dispute. Es-

pecially is it anything but sufficient to insist upon the reading as a blunder of the scribe's, because it comes into conflict with some theory which demands that the character of the text shall be altered in order that its own character may be saved.

There is another objection to this sort of emendation. This arises from the nature of the blunder that is supposed to have been committed. The change of *erne* to *yerne* is not a change that a scribe would have been likely to make. That he should turn an assonant ryme into a syllabic one is quite conceivable. The former is something that has never been really naturalized in English versification. It has been practised at times, but it has never been made familiar. It can be found to some extent in the poetry of the thirteenth century. In the fourteenth its use was already dying out. To most men in any period of our literary history, its frequent recurrence, or even its occasional occurrence, would have sounded strangely, not to say unpleasantly. It would be natural, therefore, for many a copyist, in meeting with an assonant ryme, to infer that a mistake had been made in the proper word. If the one that struck him as such came to his mind, he would be disposed to substitute it for that of his text, if thereby the precise sound and sense were preserved. The reverse process, for this same reason, would be unnatural. To turn a syllabic ryme into an assonant one would be a conscious alteration on the part of the transcriber which it is difficult to accept as probable without decisive proof. As he would not have been likely to alter the word intentionally, as there is no evidence that he did so thoughtlessly, the

reading should continue to stand as it appears in the original authorities.

This point about the probability of substituting a syllabic ryme for an assonant one is not a matter of inference alone. What has been suggested as a possible course on the part of the scribe has, in all probability, actually taken place. The second stanza of the fifth book of 'Troilus and Cressida' furnishes an illustration which in respect to this matter may be deemed almost conclusive. It reads as follows:

“ The golde-tressed Phebus, heigh on lofte,  
Thries hadde alle with his bemes clere,  
The snowes molte; and Zephirus as ofte  
Ybrought ayeyn the tender leves grene,  
Syn that the sone of Ecuba the queene  
Bygan to love hire firste, for whom his sorwe  
Was al, that she departe sholde a morwe.”

Such is the way the verse appears in all the printed editions, and in the best manuscripts. If we pay the usual deference to authority, we are bound to assume that it is the reading that came from the poet himself. In that case, no more satisfactory illustration of his use of an assonant ryme could be demanded or received. This was not a reading, however, that recommended itself to one of the scribes. He may have taken the ground that Chaucer never used an assonant ryme, or, if he did, it was something he had better have left undone. Or, more probably, he may never have heard of an assonant ryme, or have had the least understanding of what it was. Under such circumstances, the employment of *clere*, at the end of the second line, would have seemed



to him an unmistakable blunder which it was his duty to correct if he could. Correct it he certainly did. For it he substituted *shene*, and thereby secured a perfect syllabic ryme. That the change was due to him is evident from the concurrence of the other and better authorities in the reading *clere*. But the value of this scribe's testimony to the purity of Chaucer's versification is sadly impaired by the fact that his text is much the worst that has been printed.<sup>1</sup> So bad is it, indeed, that had we to rely upon it alone, it would be impossible in many places in 'Troilus and Cressida' to establish the versification or settle the sense of the author.

It is hardly worth while to do more than make a general reference to the tests which deal with the subject of unusual rymes. They occur in Chaucer, as every one will concede; but they occur rarely. The matter, therefore, is essentially one of degree. The same statement can be made in regard to what, for lack of a better term, I have called the rhetorical test. That this is unfailingly observed, no one maintains. The seven-line stanzas, for instance, in the poet's writings are almost invariably complete in themselves. The sense is rarely carried on from one stanza to another. While this is true as a general proposition, there are a number of exceptions to be found to this usual practice.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, there are decided variations in the closeness of the connection that exists in the case of these exceptions. The

<sup>1</sup> This is Harleian MS. 3943.

<sup>2</sup> See *Troilus and Cressida*, book i., stanzas xxv., xxvi.; book ii., stanzas clxxxi., clxxxii.; book iii., stanzas xix., xx.; lxxxvi., lxxxvii., in Chaucer

Society's Edition. See, also, lines 245, 246, 343, 344, and 350, 351 of the *Second Nun's tale*, and lines 280, 281 of the *Parliament of Fowls*.

instances, however, will not amount to half a dozen in which the break between the stanzas is of such a nature as not to demand the use of any punctuation at all, or any involving more of a pause than that implied in the resort to a comma. Nor will all the examples that can be collected from all of the poet's writings of these junctions, whether of a loose or close character, amount to the number of a score. So little is there anything conclusive also in the so-called test of vocabulary that we can afford to leave it, with that of unusual rymes, till we come to its consideration in the discussion of the genuineness of the 'Romance of the Rose.' Here we proceed to the investigation of the far more important one that rests upon grammatical endings. This demands careful examination.

Does Chaucer never ryme the past participle of the weak verb with the preterite or with the infinitive? That he does not in any instance has been, and is, most stoutly maintained. On the strength of this view, Professor Skeat changes in the Second Nun's tale the words *he wente* into *is went*, because if the former were allowed to stand, the preterite *wente* would be found ryming with a past participle, *ghent*. The reading thus condemned and changed is supported by the authority of five of the six texts, and by the Harleian manuscript in addition. These are all declared to be wrong, while the Cambridge manuscript—which, however good, is unquestionably inferior to some of the others—is represented as alone preserving the true form as written by the poet. "The false rime," says Professor Skeat, "detects the blunder at once; Chaucer does not rime the

weak past tense *wente* with a past participle like *ghent*. . . . The student should particularly observe an instance like this. The rules of rime in Chaucer, are, on the whole, so carefully observed that, when once they are learnt, a false rime jars upon the ear with such discord as to be unpleasantly remarkable, and should be at once detected.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, it must be conceded that it is not a very common practice on the part of the poet to ryme an infinitive or a weak preterite with a weak past participle. If, accordingly, a marked variation in this matter prevails among manuscripts otherwise equally good, sound criticism must prefer the regular form to the one exhibiting such an apparent license. Thus, in the third set of stanzas of the ‘Complaint of Venus,’ we find the infinitives *asente*, *tourmente*, *repente*, and *represente*, and the preterites *mente* and *wente*, all ryming together. With them occurs also a line which in two of the manuscripts, and in Julian Notary’s first printed edition, reads as follows:

“That love so hye a grace hath to thee sent.”

Here would be a past participle ryming with infinitives and preterites. But the other five manuscripts containing this passage read substantially in this way:

“That love so hye a grace (un)to thee sente.”

Under the circumstances we are bound to reject the former line in favor of the latter, though the manuscript authority for the first reading, in everything except numbers, is full as good as that for the second. So, again, in the ‘House of Fame,’ a passage occurs which is sus-

<sup>1</sup> Skeat’s *Man of Law’s Tale*, etc. (2d ed.), p. 179.

ceptible of a double interpretation. The dreamer, describing what he sees pictured on the walls of the Temple of Venus, says:

“ And next that saugh I how Venus,  
Whan that she saugh the castel brende,  
Doune from the hevene gan descende.”

Here *brende*, so far as the sense is concerned, might be considered a past participle. Such, in fact, it would be natural to assume it at the first glance. But the fact that an infinitive appears ryming to it in the following line forces us, in conformity with the principle just laid down, to treat it as the preterite of a subordinate clause with the introducing conjunction *that* omitted.

Still, there are passages in which the ryming of a weak past participle with a weak preterite is established beyond the shadow of a doubt. There are one or two instances where the evidence cannot be deemed absolutely conclusive. One of these cases is that of the obsolete verb *abraid*, meaning ‘awake.’ It originally belonged to the strong conjugation. In the latter half of the fourteenth century it had in common usage gone over to the weak. This statement is true, also, of the simple verb *braid*, and of another compound, *out-braid*. But there are two places in Chaucer’s writings where the preterite *abrayd* or *abrayde* rymes with the past participle of *say*. One of these is in the ‘Death of Blanche,’ the other in the ‘House of Fame.’<sup>1</sup> If, in these instances, the verb belongs to the conjugation the inflection of which it follows in all other cases, it

<sup>1</sup> Lines 192 and 110 respectively.

has then clearly failed to conform to the test which the poet has been represented as incapable of violating. The only method that can be adopted to meet this departure from the path of metrical and grammatical rectitude is to take the ground that the verb was inflected by Chaucer both ways, just as, for illustration, the verb *thrive* is inflected with us now. There were other verbs that were subjected by him to a similar treatment, two of which belonged strictly to the weak conjugation. We find in his writings *ron* and *reyned* as preterites of *rain*, and *stak* and *stiked* as preterites of *stick*. This plea cannot be deemed absolutely satisfactory by the devout believer in the rule of never violated law. The verb *abraid* is fairly common in Chaucer and Gower, and in the writings of both, with the possible exception of these two instances, it is invariably inflected according to the weak conjugation. Still, in the lack of anything better, it may be deemed sufficient by the advocates of the view that it was impossible to ryme a weak preterite with a weak past participle; for there are examples enough of the practice to render the citation of these particular ones of no special importance to the disbeliever in the view.

The list of these, in fact, is somewhat formidable. In 'Anelida and Arcite,' the past participle *had* rymes with the preterites *ladde* and *spradde*.<sup>1</sup> In the 'Parliament of Fowls,' the preterite *broughte* rymes with the past participle *wrought*.<sup>2</sup> In 'Troilus and Cressida,' the past participle *fled* rymes with the preterite *bredde*; the past

<sup>1</sup> *Anelida and Arcite*, lines 37, 39, 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliament of Fowls*, lines 121, 123.



participle *excused* with the preterite *accusede*; the past participle *sprad* with the preterite *hadde*; the past participle *had* with the preterite *cladde*; and the preterite *mette* with the past participle *whet*.<sup>1</sup> In the 'Legend of Good Women' the preterite *heryede* rymes with the past participle *beryed*, and the past participle *served* with the preterite *deservede*.<sup>2</sup> In the Knight's tale, the preterite *signifyede* rymes with the past participle *cried*.<sup>3</sup> In this case, however, two manuscripts—the Petworth and the Harleian—turn the latter word into a preterite, though not at all to the advantage of the verse. In the Man of Law's tale the preterite *mette* rymes with the past participle *yshet*, the past participle *converted* with the preterite *astertede*, the past participle *exiled* with the preterite *bigilede*, and the past participle *ymet* with the infinitive *lette* and the preterite *sette*.<sup>4</sup> In this last instance, however, the preterite *sette* is turned into the participle *set* in two manuscripts, the Cambridge and the Harleian. In the Clerk's tale, the past participle *had* rymes with the preterite *dradde*, and in another place with the preterite *spradde*. In it also the preterite *amevede* rymes with the past participle *agreved*.<sup>5</sup> In the Summoner's tale, the past participle *amended* rymes with the preterite *defendede*.<sup>6</sup> Here, again, an inferior manuscript—the Petworth—makes both words past participles. In the Franklin's tale, the past participle *op-*

<sup>1</sup> *Troilus and Cressida*, i., 463, 465; ii., 1079, 1081; iv., 1422, 1424; 1688, 1690; v., 1758, 1760.

<sup>2</sup> *Legend of Good Women*, lines 787, 788, and lines 2384, 2385.

<sup>3</sup> *Knight's tale*, lines 1485, 1486.

<sup>4</sup> *Man of Law's tale*, lines 461, 462; 337, 339; 449, 451; and 1017, 1019, 1020.

<sup>5</sup> *Clerk's tale*, lines 464, 467; 666, 668; and 442, 444.

<sup>6</sup> *Summoner's tale*, lines 125, 126.

*pressed* rymes with the preterite *redressede*.<sup>1</sup> In the Monk's tale the past participle *maried* rymes with the preterite *tariede*,<sup>2</sup> and the preterites *espyede* and *cryede* ryme with the past participles *allyed* and *misgyed*. In the tale of the Nun's Priest, the past participle *yseyled* rymes with the preterite *eylede*, and the preterite *sewede* with the past participle *eschewed*.<sup>3</sup> In the 'Complaint of Mars,' also, the preterite *com* rymes with the past participle *overcome*;<sup>4</sup> but as in this instance there is a possibility that *com* may be deemed a relic of the ancient subjunctive usage, and therefore entitled to a final *e*, the example will not be insisted upon at this point. It can be the better left, because the ryming under similar circumstances of the infinitive with the preterite of the strong verb will come up later in the discussion of the genuineness of the 'Romance of the Rose.'

Here, however, have been given about two dozen instances that cannot be disputed of the ryming of the preterite and the past participle of weak verbs. To them, also, we must, according to all sound principles of criticism, add the one previously mentioned as occurring in the Second Nun's tale; for with examples like these before us, we cannot afford to abandon the reading of the best manuscripts, in order to bring the text into harmony with preconceived views as to what the author must have written. In addition to these instances, eight of the nine manuscript authorities ryme the past par-

<sup>1</sup> *Franklin's tale*, lines 707, 708.

<sup>2</sup> *Monk's tale*, lines 281, 283; 538, 280; 517, 518.

540, 541, 543.

<sup>3</sup> *Nun's Priest's tale*, lines 279,

280; 517, 518.

<sup>4</sup> *Complaint of Mars*, lines 65, 68.

ticiples *betrayed* with the preterite *payede* in lines 1390 and 1391 of the 'Legend of Good Women,' and in order to follow the reading of the one manuscript that makes *payed* a participial form, the adjective *goode*, of the definite declension, has to be shorn of its final *e* in pronunciation.<sup>1</sup> In lines 1696 and 1697 of this same poem there can be little doubt, also, that *wrought* must be regarded as a past participle, ryming with the preterite *thoughte*. An interpretation of the passage can be given if it be treated as a preterite; but it is a forced interpretation. Gower, it is to be remarked, furnishes also several instances of this same usage, though, in this respect, he is clearly more conservative than Chaucer. Still, in the 'Confessio Amantis,' the preterites *herde*, *wente*, *made*, *foughte*, *tremblede*, and *com* will be found ryming respectively with the past participles *answerd*, *went*, *had*, *taught*, *assembled*, and *overcome*. He has also the infinitive *wedde* ryming with the past participle *sped*.<sup>2</sup>

Yet while examples of this usage can be found, it is eminently true that not many, comparatively speaking, can be found. It is fair to assume from this condition of things that in the Midland dialect, at the time Chaucer wrote, the distinction between the preterite and the past participle of the weak conjugation was already betraying many signs of the complete break-down which was speed-

<sup>1</sup> The line in this one manuscript—the one containing the first form of the prologue—reads as follows:

"As shal the goode man that therefore hath payed."

<sup>2</sup> See the examples in the *Confessio Amantis* in the following places: vol. i., p. 151; vol. ii., pp. 7, 23,

and 307; vol. iii., pp. 263, 350, and 265. The words are given here in their proper spelling, and not as found in Pauli's edition. In the Chaucer references, also, they have been made to conform to their theoretically correct grammatical form, and not to the one they actually have in the manuscripts.

ily to overtake it. In fact, this is conceded by the most strenuous advocates of this test. They admit that the preterite *hadde* is one of the very common words which are treated by the poet as monosyllables. Such an admission really gives up the point in dispute. Common words are necessarily the ones that would take the lead in any linguistic movement going on to discard the final *e* of the preterite. If its rejection became established in the case of the verbs most frequently employed, it would be merely a question of time when the same principle would be extended to all. It is noteworthy, therefore, that violations of this test are more numerous and more pronounced in Chaucer's later work than in his earlier. The influences that were breaking it down were growing stronger, and to them he was more and more disposed to yield. Yet, after all, it was only occasionally that he did yield. Great authors are usually the last to consent to marked innovations in language. Accordingly, when new forms are found in a few instances in their writings, it is pretty safe to infer that they have been employed by others on a large scale.

We have now finished our examination of the tests of the second class. The exceptions that have been pointed out as existing are sufficient to show that not a single one of these tests can be regarded as absolutely decisive. If they fail in a single case, it necessarily follows that they are not infallible; and there is none of them but fails in at least one or two instances, and most of them fail in several. Still, the importance of these exceptions can easily be overrated. However numerous they appear taken together, when contrasted with the



vast body of verse in which they are imbedded, they seem hardly worthy of consideration. They do not really invalidate the force of any one of the tests against which they are directed, unless it be the one called grammatical. What they invalidate is the position of those who have given these tests the force of obligatory observances, and have thereby converted them into a court of last resort, from whose decisions there can be no appeal. From the examination made it is consequently clear that the question is one not of kind, but of degree. As regards the poet himself, it can be stated in a few words. Certain practices of ryming rarely used by Chaucer prevailed in his time. He falls into them often enough to show that he was exposed to their influence. He falls so little under the influence exerted by them that it is evident he was aware of their existence and avoided them—at least most of them—on principle. He scarcely ever yields to the temptation of following them, unless, to all appearance, caught in some metrical strait from which he cannot easily escape without resorting to their aid. If, therefore, in any disputed poem numerous instances are found of conformity to even a single one of the methods from which he habitually refrains in poems indisputably his, it is fair to assume that the burden of proof must rest upon him who takes the ground that Chaucer is the author of the piece in which these instances occur. If examples are found of all these methods, the task becomes proportionately difficult. A work exhibiting peculiarities of such a character on any large scale would require the strongest sort of external evidence in its favor to counterpoise the in-



ternal evidence against its being considered a production of the poet. The value of most of these tests is accordingly very high ; it is only by setting up for them the claim of infallibility that their estimation can be seriously impaired.

This is an inference that can be safely drawn from the practice of the poet. Another one, though far from being certain, may be suggested as probable from the occasional deviations he exhibits from the restraints he seems to have imposed upon himself. Comparatively few of these deviations occur in his latest productions, such as the 'Legend of Good Women' or the 'Canterbury Tales.' So far as it is right, therefore, to draw any conclusions whatever about his literary development from the rules he regularly observed, and the violations of them in which he occasionally indulged, two may be considered as borne out to some extent by a consideration of the few facts that have been brought to light. One of these is that Chaucer is a poet who was much more particular about those details of his art that appeal to the modern reader than any writer in our tongue who flourished at the same time with him or immediately after him. Gower approaches the nearest to him in this respect. In certain others, indeed, he surpasses him. But in his employment of unusual rymes he is distinctly inferior to his great contemporary, so far as we can judge from the text of his work to which we are compelled to resort. The second conclusion is that as time went on there was an apparent increase in the poet's scrupulousness. There was most certainly no diminution. The versification of the 'Canterbury Tales' seems to support this

view. It is not alone that there is greater freedom in the movement. That is something that would naturally come with the greater mastery gained over the verse. There is also far greater precision. It is a reasonable presumption that Chaucer permitted himself much more license, in the matter of allowable rymes, in the octosyllabic verse, in which he probably began to compose, than in the longer line he himself introduced into the speech. His own words almost imply this. In a passage in the 'House of Fame' he tells us expressly that he is not endeavoring to exhibit his mastery of poetical art, but is simply striving to produce something that may be agreeable.<sup>1</sup> The language he uses apparently indicates that in this measure he did not look upon himself as bound by the strict canons of ryme which in other kinds of verse he might feel himself under the necessity of observing. Still, this would hardly of itself account for the difference. In Chaucer's literary development we may fairly recognize the growth of the artistic conscience. It tended to make him conservative. It disposed him to cling to the practices of the past, to hesitate about adopting new methods of expression which were creeping in, but had not yet become established in the speech of the class to whose usage he at-

<sup>1</sup> "O God of science and of light,  
 Apollo, through thy greātē might  
 This little lastē book thou gye!<sup>a</sup>  
 Not that I wilnē<sup>b</sup> for mast'ry  
 Here art poetical be shewēd;  
 But, for the ryme is light and lewēd,<sup>c</sup>  
 Yet make it somewhat agreeāble,  
 Though some verse<sup>d</sup> fail in a syllāble;  
 And that I do no diligēce  
 To showē craftē<sup>e</sup> but sentēce.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Guide. <sup>b</sup> Wish. <sup>c</sup> Simple, inartificial. <sup>d</sup> Verses. <sup>e</sup> Skill. <sup>f</sup> Matter.

tached the highest weight. He was willing to limit his liberty by rules which most of his contemporaries were showing a tendency to disregard or despise. This was doubtless due in part to the fact that his genius, though working within these limitations, gave him the power of producing results that could not be obtained by others while in the enjoyment of the largest liberty. But back of this lay the conviction that art, to exert its fullest influence, must put about its expression the restraints of form: not necessarily because such restraints make it seem any more effective to the writer, but because he sees that it is the only way to make it effective, as regards the reader or hearer.

We come now to the practical application of these tests. What are the undoubted works of Chaucer? What are the doubtful ones? What are the undoubtedly spurious ones? The first question can receive an immediate answer. The answers to the two others will depend largely upon our view of the facts that will be brought to light in the account of the methods by which and of the extent to which successive additions were made to the list of the poet's productions. For about the genuineness of certain works there has not been, nor can there be, any controversy. This is due to the fact that they comply with all the requirements demanded by the tests of the first class. They have been specifically mentioned by Chaucer himself as his own. They have also been ascribed to him by his contemporaries or the copyists of his manuscripts. They are written likewise in the language of the period. In regard to them, therefore, we are upon solid ground. In this way

there has been furnished a definite body of productions which we can take as a secure starting-point. The genuineness of the titles of such a list cannot well be disputed in any case. As a matter of fact, the genuineness of the work bearing the title is disputed in only one case.

What, precisely, are the works that are attributed without dissent to Chaucer? Naturally the poet himself is the highest authority as to what he wrote. There are three instances in which he mentions his productions; or, at any rate, there are three instances which are ascribed to him. The first, about which there can be no question, occurs in the prologue to the 'Legend of Good Women.' This, as has been pointed out, exists in an earlier and a later version. The former contains a title which is not found in the latter; and in quoting the passage the lines in which it is mentioned will be enclosed in brackets. In the prologue the God of Love, walking with the Queen Alcestis, meets the poet, threatens him with his vengeance, and accuses him of having composed works that had the tendency to withdraw the minds of men from devotion to his service. "Thou mayst it not deny," he says,

"For in plain text, withouten need of glose,  
Thou hast translated the Romance of the Rose,  
And of Cresside thou hast said as thee list,  
That maketh men to women lessè trist,<sup>1</sup>  
That be as true as ever was any steel."

Against this charge Alcestis makes an elaborate defence

<sup>1</sup> Trust.

of the poet, and in the course of it enumerates a number of his works in the following lines :

“ Leteth<sup>1</sup> your ire, and be somewhat tretable.<sup>2</sup>  
 The man hath servèd you of his cunning,  
 And furthered well your law in his making.<sup>3</sup>  
 Albeit that he can not well endite,  
 Yet hath he makèd lewèd<sup>4</sup> folk delight  
 To servè you, in praising of your name.  
 He made the book that hight<sup>5</sup> the House of Fame,  
 And eke the Death of Blaunche the Duchéss,  
 And the Parliament of Fowlès, as I guess,  
 And all the love of Palemon and Arcite  
 Of Thebès, though the story is knowen lite ;<sup>6</sup>  
 And many an hymnè for your holy days,  
 That highten ballades, roundels, virelays.  
 And for to speak of other holinèss,  
 He hath in prosè translated Boece,  
 [And of the Wretched Engendering of Mankind  
 As man may in Pope Innocent yfind],  
 And made the life also of Saint Cecile.  
 He made also, gone is a greatè while,  
 Orígenès upon the Maudèlain.  
 Him oughtè now to have the lessè pain,  
 He hath made many a lay and many a thing.’

The next list of Chaucer’s works is found in the noted Retractation at the conclusion of the ‘Canterbury Tales.’ That portion of it containing the titles of his productions reads as follows :

“ Wherefore I beseech you meekly for the mercy of  
 “ God, that ye pray for me, that Christ have mercy on me  
 “ and forgive me my guilts, and namely<sup>7</sup> of my transla-

<sup>1</sup> Abandon.

<sup>2</sup> Gracious, complaisant.

<sup>3</sup> Poetry. <sup>4</sup> Ignorant. <sup>5</sup> Is called.

<sup>6</sup> Little.

<sup>7</sup> Especially.



"tions and enditing of worldly vanities, the which I re-  
 "voke in my retractions, as is the book of Troilus, the  
 "book also of Fame, the book of the five and twenty  
 "Ladies, the book of the Duchess, the book of Saint Val-  
 "entine's day of the Parliament of Birds, the Tales of  
 "Canterbury—thilke<sup>1</sup> that sounen into<sup>2</sup> sin—the book of  
 "the Lion ; and many another book if they were in my  
 "remembrance ; and many a song and many a lecherous  
 "lay, that Christ for his great mercy forgive me the sin.  
 "But of the translation of Boethius *De Consolatione*, and  
 "other books of legends of saints, and homilies and mo-  
 "rality and devotion, that thank I our Lord Jesus  
 "Christ and his blissful mother and all the saints of  
 "heaven, beseeching hem<sup>3</sup> that they from henceforth  
 "unto my life's end send me grace to bewail my guilts  
 "and to study to the salvation of my soul."

The genuineness of this recantation has been a matter of much discussion. Its literary history has been somewhat peculiar. It appeared in both of Caxton's editions of the 'Canterbury Tales' and in those of his immediate successors.<sup>4</sup> It was not printed, however, in the edition of Thynne. As his came out as early as 1532, it cannot be said with positiveness that it was a religious motive that dictated the suppression by that editor of what must certainly have been contained in most, if not all, of the manuscripts in his possession. Still, even then the attacks by the poet upon various of the clerical orders are likely to have met with a sympathy the strength

<sup>1</sup> Those.

<sup>2</sup> Tend to.

but in the preface to Urry's edition it is said to have been first printed

<sup>3</sup> Them.

<sup>4</sup> This is Tyrwhitt's statement ; by Pynson in 1526.

of which it was not desirable to impair by imputing to him any regret for their appearance. The hostility felt towards the Roman Catholic church would naturally cause the omission of the passage in all the editions that followed Thynne's, and were based upon it. Certain it is that it was not included in any of these, and was first printed again in Urry's in 1721. Still, its existence had been known to scholars. Many theories had been then, and have been since, advanced as to its genuineness either in whole or in part. It is one of those knotty questions in which Chaucer's life and writings abound. Convincing arguments can be made either for or against this Retractation as the work of the poet himself, so long as the arguments on the other side are carelessly considered or carefully ignored. Its genuineness is assuredly made very suspicious by the character of the variations which are found in some of the manuscripts containing it, and the lack of form it exhibits as found in all. It omits, moreover, from its list of exceptional productions the 'Romance of the Rose.' Yet this was a work that in the original equalled anything written anywhere by the poet in the freedom of its sentiments and in its attacks upon the clerical orders. Nor is the translation that has been handed down lacking in the latter respect, so far as the friars are concerned. Again, the fact that in this recantation the 'Legend of Good Women' is represented as containing the history of five-and-twenty ladies militates against the theory that the list could have been drawn up by Chaucer himself, or even with his knowledge; for he had begun that work with the implied assertion that he purposed to give an account of

no more than twenty, and he must have known that he had not actually given an account of half that number. On the other hand, one encounters at the outset the fact that this Retraction is found in most of the manuscripts, perhaps in all of them that are complete. This raises at once the question, not easily answered, how it could have got into them without the privity of the poet; how a forgery of this kind, if it be a forgery, could have met with a success so marked. In the present state of our knowledge, it is only he who has studied the subject little that can afford to express himself positively.

Still, whatever doubt may exist as to the genuineness of this Retraction, there can be no reasonable doubt as to the authenticity of the list of titles it contains. Whether the sentiments found in it are those of the poet himself, or whether by some device the passage was foisted into his works, it comes from a period when men could ascertain with exactness the truth about his writings, and could have no motive to represent the facts otherwise than as they were. The authority of the catalogue given in the extract quoted is, therefore, not questioned. This is true of both parties to the controversy. So far as regards this point, equal credit is given to the recantation by those who look upon it as expressing what the poet himself felt, and by those who look upon it as expressing nothing more than what somebody else thought he ought to have felt. The testimony furnished by it is, consequently, admitted on all sides.

There is one other direct reference made by Chaucer to what he had written. It is contained in the prologue

to the Man of Law's tale. This one of the Canterbury pilgrims, when called upon by the host to perform his part, admits his obligation, but depreciates his ability. He himself can tell "no thrifty tale," he assures his questioner; stories of such a character, he adds, have been told after a fashion by Chaucer. That poet, he says,

"Though he can but lewedly<sup>1</sup>  
 On metres and on, rynging craftily,  
 Hath said hem<sup>2</sup> in such English as he can  
 Of oldè time, as knoweth many a man;  
 And if he have not said hem, liefè<sup>3</sup> brother,  
 In one book, he hath said hem in another;  
 For he hath told of lovers up and down  
 Mo than Ovidè made of mentiõn  
 In his Epistèlés that be full old.  
 What should I tell hem syn<sup>4</sup> that they be told?  
 In youth he made of Ceyx and Alcyone,  
 And sithen<sup>4</sup> hath he spoken of everichone,  
 These noble wives and these lovers eke.  
 Whoso that will his largè volume seek,  
 Clepèd the Saintès Legend of Cupide,  
 There may he see the largè woundès wide  
 Of Lucrece and of Babyloín Thisbé,  
 The sword of Dido for the false Aenée,  
 The tree of Phillis for her Demophon,  
 The plaint of Dejanire and of Hermione,  
 Of Adriane and of Hypsipyle,  
 The barren islè standing in the see,  
 The dreint<sup>5</sup> Leander for his fair Heró,  
 The tearès of Helén, and eke the wo  
 Of Briseis, and of thee, Ladomia,

<sup>1</sup> Ignorantly.<sup>2</sup> Them.<sup>3</sup> Dear.<sup>4</sup> Since.<sup>5</sup> Drowned.

The cruelty of the queenè Medea,  
Thy little children hanging by the hals<sup>1</sup>  
For thy Jasón, that was in love so false :  
Q Hypermnestra, Penelope, Alceste,  
Your wifehood he commendeth with the best."

This passage has contributed its share to the perplexities which beset the student of Chaucer's writings. There can be no doubt that the 'Legend of Good Women' is meant by the large volume which is called the 'Saints' Legend of Cupid,' or, as we should express it, the 'Legend of the Saints of Cupid.' This, however, raises a difficulty. The disagreement between what is said of the book, and what is said in the book - itself, comes at once into prominence. Chaucer, indeed, may not have intended to give here a catalogue of all the persons whose sufferings on account of love he had recorded. But the singular thing about the passage quoted is that it is largely a catalogue of those whose sufferings he has not recorded. In this extract the names appear of sixteen women whose stories are represented as having been told by the poet. Of these, eight only are found in the 'Legend of Good Women.' That work includes, to be sure, two not mentioned here, Cleopatra and Philomene. It also introduces Alcestis, and gives her the place of honor; but it does not tell her tale, nor that of Dejanira, nor of Hermione, nor of Hero, nor of Helen, nor of Briseis, nor of Laodamia, nor of Penelope. The only plausible explanation that presents itself of a discrepancy that is never likely to be

<sup>1</sup> Neck.



satisfactorily explained is that Chaucer, when he wrote the prologue to the Man of Law's tale, was still engaged upon the composition of the 'Legend of Good Women;' and that he included in his list those of whom he had it in mind to write, as well as those of whom he had actually written. Perhaps in the cases of all mentioned outlines of the story he contemplated had been sketched. Additions, in consequence, could and would be made to the whole poem from time to time as these were filled up and completed, if they were ever completed at all. According to this theory, the 'Legend of Good Women' would have remained in his hands during his life. Its composition, accordingly, would have been contemporaneous—at least with the exception of its prologue—with that of the 'Canterbury Tales,' instead of preceding them, as is commonly supposed. Certain it is that the work was left unfinished at his death; and the sentiments expressed in it show that while begun with enthusiasm, it had lost its interest for the poet long before it had reached even so much of a conclusion as it now possesses. This explanation may receive support from what is said of Medea. In the passage just cited, it is her cruelty in the treatment of her children that is in the poet's thoughts; but not even an allusion to this tragedy appears in the story as told in the 'Legend of Good Women.' It would, accordingly, be in full consonance with all the known facts to assume that when Chaucer wrote the prologue to the Man of Law's tale he had not written the account of Medea which has come down to us; and that when it was written it came to be something different from what he had purposed

to make it originally. The most that can be claimed for this explanation is that it is possibly true, and not improbable in itself. Still, it has nothing in its favor that can strictly be called evidence.

The extracts that have been cited give us all the direct information that can be gained from Chaucer himself as to the books he wrote. To the poet's own testimony there is but one of his contemporaries that adds anything. This is John Lydgate, the Monk of Bury. In several of his poems occur references to the writings of the man whom he was in the habit of calling his master. In the prologue to his 'Story of Thebes,' he speaks with a good deal of detail of Chaucer's greatest work, with which he sought to have this one of his own incorporated as a supplementary Canterbury tale. In the sixteenth century men gratified his wish in this matter; later times have not been so compliant about his production, and modern editions know it not. It is, however, in the prologue to his translation of Boccaccio's 'Fall of Princes' that he has given a pretty full list of the productions of Chaucer. The verses containing this catalogue are in a very corrupt state, as they are commonly printed. Some corrections could, indeed, be easily made; but, in the lack of an authoritative text, I have deemed it best to conform to the only one accessible. Here accordingly follow, with all their blunders, the lines in which Lydgate mentions the works that Chaucer wrote:

" In youthe he made a translacion  
Of a boke whiche called is Trophe  
In Lumbarde tonge, as men may rede and se,

And in our vulgar, long or that ye deyde,  
Gave it the name of Troylous and Cresseyde.

“Whiche for to rede lovers them delyte,  
They have therin so grete devocyon;  
And to his poete also hymselfe to quyte,  
Of Boecius boke The Consolacioun  
Made in his tyme an hole translacion;  
And to his sonne that called was Lowys  
He made a treatise, full noble and of gret prise.

“Upon that labour, in full notable forme  
Set them in order with ther divisyon,  
Menns wittes to accomplysshe and conforme,  
To understonde by full expert reasons,  
By domifyeng of sondrie mancions,  
The rote out sought at the ascendent,  
To forne or he gafe any jugement.

“He wrote also full many a day agone  
Daunt in Englyssh, hymself so doth expresse,  
The pytous story of Ceix and Alcion,  
And the Deth also of Blaunche the Duchesse;  
And notably dyd his busynesse,  
By great avyse his wittes to dispose  
To translate The Romaynt of the Rose.

“Thus in vertu he set all his entent,  
Idelnesse and vices for to fle;  
Of Fowles also he wrote the Parlyment,  
Therin remembrynge of ryall Egles thre,  
Howe in their choyse they felt adversite,  
Tofore Nature profered the batayle  
Eche for his partye, if he wolde awayle.

“He did also his diligence and payne  
In our vulgar to translate and endyte

Orygene upon the Maudelayn ;  
And of the Lyon a boke he dyd wryte ;  
Of Annelida, of false Arcite  
He made a Complaynte doleful and piteous ;  
And of the Broche whiche that Vulcanus

“ At Thebes wrought, full diverse of nature ;  
Ovyde wryteth whoso therof had a sight  
For high desire he shuld nat endure,  
But he it had never be glade ne light,  
And if he had it onys in his might,  
Like as my maister saith and writeth in dede,  
It to conserve he shuld aye live in drede.

“ This poete wrote, at the requeste of the quene,  
A Legende of perfite holynesse,  
Of good Women to fynd out nynetene  
That did excell in bounte and fayrenes,  
But for his labour and besinesse  
Was importable his wittes to encombre  
In all this world to fynd so grete a nombre.

“ He made the boke of Canterbury Tales,  
When the Pylgryms rode on pylgrymage  
Throughout Kent, by hylles and by dales,  
And all the stories told in their passage,  
Endited them full well in our langage,  
Some of knighthode, some of gentillesse,  
And some of love, and some of perfitenes ;

“ And some also of grete moralite,  
Some of disporte, including grete sentence :  
In prose he wrote the Tale of Melibe  
And of his wife, that called was Prudence ;  
And of Grisildes perfite pacience ;  
And how the Monke of stories new and olde  
Piteous tragedies by the weye tolde.

“ This sayed poete, my maister, in his dayes  
Made and composed ful many a fresh dite,  
Complaintes, ballades, roundeles, virelaies,  
Full delectable to heren and to se,  
For which men shulde of right and equite,  
Sith he of English in making was the best,  
Pray unto God to yeve his soule good rest.”

Lydgate, in his best estate, is anything but a master of felicitous expression or harmonious versification. His matter is better than his manner. Even then there is little compliment conveyed in the assertion that what he said is worthy of much more respect than the way in which he said it. But poor as may be his poetry both in form and substance, the lines just cited do him injustice. In some of them the sense is obscure; in others there is no sense at all. Fortunately, however, the corruption of the text does not affect the accuracy of the catalogue of Chaucer's works which he has here given. In this matter, therefore, these verses furnish independent testimony of the highest value.

There are in existence, accordingly, four lists of Chaucer's writings which go back to the very earliest period. Two of them, and perhaps three, are due to the poet himself. The fourth comes from a writer who was both a contemporary and a disciple. None of them are complete, none of them profess to be. Titles are absent which we should naturally expect to find. No reference to the translation of the *Roman de la Rose* is found in the Retractation. Lydgate does not mention the 'House of Fame.' There is nothing in these omissions, however, to impugn the authority of the lists,



so far as they extend. An analysis of them enables us, accordingly, to make certain definite statements. The most important is that many of the poet's shorter pieces and some of his longer works have not been preserved. The latter are naturally the only ones spoken of by their titles in these lists. Three of those thus mentioned in them appear to be no longer extant. The fact that one of these three had ever had an existence at all was not, indeed, made known until within a recent period. It is nowhere referred to, save in the earlier version of the prologue to the 'Legend of Good Women,' which was itself never put in print until 1864. In that it is called, as we have seen, 'The Wretched Engendering of Mankind.' This is with good reason supposed to be a translation of the treatise of Pope Innocent III. entitled *De Contemptu Mundi sive De Miseria Conditionis Humanae*. Another work mentioned both by Chaucer and Lydgate is the one termed 'Origines upon the Maudeleyne.' This Tyrwhitt conjectured to be a version of the *Homilia de Maria Magdalena*, once commonly, though falsely, attributed to Origen. This view, which he was the first to take, is now accepted with substantial unanimity. Besides these two, there is mention made by Lydgate and in the Retractation of a production called the 'Book of the Lion.' This is something about which we are utterly in the dark. Tyrwhitt thought it might be a translation of the *Dit du Lion*, a poem of Machault, composed in the year 1342. But unlike the other two lost books, there is nothing in the references to it to indicate its character, or to suggest whence it came. So long, therefore, as we do

not have the work itself, it seems hardly worth while to spend time in speculating whether it was an original or a translation, and if a translation, who was the author of the original.

Three works, therefore, have apparently failed to reach later times; at least, of these three nothing has been preserved strictly corresponding to the titles. The probabilities are that two of them were in prose. If this be so, their disappearance is rather a loss to our knowledge of Chaucer's vocabulary than a loss to literature. But another fact presents itself upon examination. The story of Ceyx and Alcyone seems to be spoken of as an independent production. In that case, it would be distinct from the 'Death of Blanche the Duchess,' of which it now forms a part. Lydgate mentions both. His words do not prove that they were or had been separate poems; yet they would assuredly give that impression, if the latter one had not been handed down. The same statement can be made of Chaucer himself. He informs us in the prologue to the Man of Law's tale that he had told the story of Ceyx and Alcyone. In the prologue to the 'Legend of Good Women' and in the Retractation, he includes among his productions the 'Death of Blanche the Duchess.' There is, therefore, a shade of uncertainty attending the question. Still, the statements of both authors are compatible with the condition of the poem as it now stands. In the light we have, it is enough to point out the probability that what is now a mere episode of the larger work may have once been an independent whole. It is proper to add that the opposite view, which regards

these two as having always constituted one poem, may be thought to derive a certain support from the manner in which Lydgate speaks of another of Chaucer's productions. He styles it the 'Brooch of Vulcan.' No work exists with such a title. For a long while, accordingly, it was supposed to have been lost. 'The Complaint of Mars,' however, does have a reference to an ornament called the brooch of Vulcan, and gives an account of its peculiar properties. The description occupies but sixteen lines out of the three hundred the poem contains. It is not even remotely the subject of the piece; it appears in no other light than that of a comparison and illustration. Nevertheless, one of the nine extant manuscripts of the 'Complaint of Mars' has been entitled by its scribe the 'Brooch of Vulcan.' It is reasonable, therefore, to suppose that this was the name by which Lydgate knew the poem.

Lydgate, moreover, in his account of his master's writings makes another statement which has never attracted much attention, and perhaps does not deserve any. He says, expressly, that Chaucer translated Dante. From the context it is impossible to tell whether his assertion is based upon his own knowledge or upon some assertion of the poet himself. The latter seems the natural interpretation of the lines in which he mentions the fact. In that case we must assume that Chaucer spoke of the version in a poem that has not been preserved, or that Lydgate committed the blunder of imputing to him a translation of Dante as a whole, or on a large scale, on the strength of two or three passages which, according to his own avowal, he takes from

the Italian poet. It would certainly be a loose way of speaking, if he meant intentionally to describe so slight a performance in so magniloquent a manner. Yet a suspicion will occur to the student that Chaucer himself is open to a charge of the same sort of indiscretion. He made, he tells us, an English version of the Latin treatise of Pope Innocent III. on the wretchedness of the human race. Did he translate the whole of it, or only detached passages, just as it seems fair to assume, from his rendering into our tongue detached passages of Dante, that he gained the repute of having made a translation of that author? That he was very familiar with the work of Pope Innocent is certain. That he turned part of it into verse is equally certain, though, so far as I am aware, no attention has hitherto been called to the fact. The hastiest of comparisons puts this matter, however, beyond dispute. The Man of Law's tale opens, for illustration, with a vivid description of the miseries of poverty. It has no real connection with the story that follows. It is attached to it rather than united. It reads very much as if it had once formed an independent piece which had finally been fitted, none too skilfully, to the poem to which it now serves as an introduction. That such has been its history could be supported by plausible, if not convincing, arguments. For these verses depicting the sorrows of the poor man are nothing more than a translation of the sixteenth chapter—entitled *De Miseria Divitis et Pauperis*—of the first book of the treatise just mentioned. Even the quotations from Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus occur in the original. Several other of the



poet's lines in the Man of Law's tale are taken from this work. So, also, much of the discourse upon gluttony delivered by the Pardoner in his tale is based upon it directly or indirectly.<sup>1</sup> It may therefore be an interpretation worth considering, of the appearance and disappearance of the reference to this translation, that when Chaucer first made it he had in mind only certain passages in the treatise of Pope Innocent which he had turned into verse; and that afterwards he struck out the lines containing the reference, because he came to see that they conveyed an impression that something had been done which he had not really attempted.

The analysis that has been made of the evidence shows, consequently, the certain loss of some productions. It shows the possible loss of others, though we accept them as having come down to us under a different title. There are also some of which it establishes the genuineness beyond cavil. The names of these it is important to have definitely in mind. Before proceeding to the examination of the works which have at various times been attributed to Chaucer by various editors, it is desirable to know precisely what are the works attributed to him universally on the strength of his own declaration or on that of his disciple. The list of titles is not a long one. It embraces the 'Canterbury Tales,' 'Troilus and Cressida,' the 'Legend of Good Women,' the 'House of Fame,' the 'Death of Blanche the Duchess,' the 'Parliament of

<sup>1</sup> For a full account of Chaucer's Pope Innocent, see vol. ii., chapter indebtedness to this treatise of v., pp. 329-334.



Fowls,' 'Anelida and Arcite,' and the 'Complaint of Mars.' It includes also the prose version of Boethius and the treatise on the Astrolabe. Besides these, there is another production which surpasses in purely controversial interest all the others. This is the 'Romance of the Rose.' That Chaucer translated the French original there is not the slightest question; whether the translation that has been handed down is his work admits of much question. The subject will be discussed later; at this point it needs nothing more than a reference. Omitting, for the present, any consideration of it, and also of the pieces included under the general names of ballades, roundels, and virelays, the verse contained in these undisputed productions, looked at merely from the point of quantity, is something far from contemptible. The poems that have been specifically mentioned by their titles comprise more than thirty-four thousand lines. The writer who did this work was, during most of his life, a very busy man. He was much of the time engaged in occupations which allow little leisure for the care and art requisite for the highest literary creations. He was using a language that had not, as yet, been moulded to facility of expression. The quantity of verse, in consequence, significant of itself, is even more significant when we take into account its quality, when we observe how little there is in it of verbiage, how little it is desirable to skip while reading on account of its inferior literary interest.

It was doubtless the evidence found in the passages quoted that determined the genuineness of Chaucer's poems, as the personal memory of the man passed away.

It was the lists contained in them that largely guided the early printers in their choice of the poet's writings. They did not bring out the treatise on the 'Astrolabe.' This is not to be wondered at. In addition to the inevitable dryness of the work on account of its technical character, Chaucer's prose was not apt to be interesting in itself. A discovery of this sort, early times were as competent to make as were later. It was one pretty certainly made. The fact that sixteen copies still survive of Caxton's print of the translation of 'Boethius on the Consolation of Philosophy' is fairly satisfactory evidence that the edition did not disappear in consequence of the work being too eagerly sought after and too diligently read.<sup>1</sup> But it must remain a matter of surprise that neither the 'Legend of Good Women,' nor the 'Death of Blanche,' nor the 'Romance of the Rose,' was published before 1532. English literature was not then so rich that productions like these could be left in the obscurity of manuscript. Still, all the other works mentioned were brought out by Caxton or his immediate successors. They printed little else under the poet's name. In fact, but seven short pieces—the 'Ballade of Visage without Painting,' 'Gentilesse,' 'Flee from the Press,' the 'Envoy to Bukton,' the 'Envoy to Scogan,' the 'Complaint to Pity,' and the 'Complaint to his Purse'—were all of the absolutely certain works of Chaucer not specified by himself or by Lydgate which were put in type before the appearance of the folio of 1532; and for the assign-

<sup>1</sup> Blades's *Biography and Typography of William Caxton*, p. 211.

ment of these to their proper author there was manuscript authority.

It is this folio of 1532 that must be the starting-point in any further consideration of the works that go under Chaucer's name. There had, indeed, been something of an attempt in Pynson's edition of 1526 to bring together the scattered productions of the poet. But the volume containing these never had sufficient circulation to exercise any perceptible influence upon the opinion of later times. It was, in fact, speedily and effectually supplanted by the fuller edition which appeared only six years after. It is mainly noteworthy for having been the first to contain some of the pieces now regarded as spurious. It even contained some which in that uncritical age seem to have been so considered. These will be specifically mentioned after the larger list has been given which is found in the folio of 1532. For it was in that volume that a distinct and reasonably successful effort was made to collect all the writings of the poet, of whatever character.

In it appeared for the first time the four works which, as has just been stated, the early printers neglected to publish. But besides these there were included in this collective edition numerous other productions that had not been mentioned by the poet himself, or by any of his contemporaries, or even by any later writer. They had, moreover, never been attributed to him, so far as we know, by the copyist of any manuscript. Its table of contents is therefore of highest interest in itself. It records the judgment of the earliest editor of Chaucer as to what constituted his genuine works. It furnishes

the modern student of literature with a test of the value of that judgment. As the volume is far from common, the title will be given here of every production printed in it, whether in prose or ryme; and if in the latter, of every poem, whether it consists of a single stanza or extends to a hundred. In the case of the shorter or less-known pieces, the first line will be added between quotation marks. One work—a poetical address to Henry IV., earnestly counselling peace—is expressly assigned to Gower, and will therefore not be included in the numbering. There is also found in the volume a poem of Scogan's; but as this contains Chaucer's verses on 'Gentleness,' it is retained for that reason. With this explanation the following list is given of the works, long or short, that appear in the first collected edition, the folio of 1532, printed by Thomas Godfray, and edited by William Thynne:

1. The Canterbury Tales.
2. The Romaunt of the Rose.
3. Troilus and Cressida.
4. The Testament and Complaint of Cressida.
5. The Legend of Good Women.
6. A Goodly Ballade of Chaucer.

"Mother of nurture, best beloved of all." This poem contains eight seven-line stanzas with an envoy.

7. The Translation of Boethius on the Consolation of Philosophy.
8. The Dream of Chaucer.

This is the work that in modern editions goes under the name of the 'Book of the Duchesse' or 'The Death of Blanche.'

9. "My Master, etc., when of Christ our King."

This poem is now known as the 'Envoy to Bukton.' In all the

early editions it has no title, nor is the name of Buxton printed in the first line.

10. The Assembly of Fowls.

11. The Flower of Courtesy, with a ballade.

"In Feverier, when the frosty Moon." This poem consists of thirty-five seven-line stanzas. The ballade accompanying it begins with the words "With all my might and my best intent." Several of the lines of the ballade are taken from the 'Parliament of Fowls.'

12. How Pity is Dead and Buried in a Gentle Heart.

"Pity that I have sought so yore ago."

13. La Belle Dame sans Mercy.

This poem consists of one hundred and two stanzas, the first four of which, constituting the introduction, are in the seven-line stanza, and the remaining ninety-eight in the eight-line stanza of the Monk's tale.

14. Of Queen Anelida and False Arcite.

15. The Assembly of Ladies.

"In September at the falling of the leaf." This is a poem of one hundred and eight seven-line stanzas. It purports to be written by a woman, and bears a close resemblance to the 'Parliament of Fowls,' of which it is an obvious imitation.

16. The Conclusions of the Astrolabe.

17. The Complaint of the Black Knight.

In modern editions this frequently appears under the title of 'The Complaint of a Lover's Life.'

18. A Praise of Women.

"Although thee list of women evil to speak." This poem consists of twenty-five seven-line stanzas.

19. The House of Fame.

20. The Testament of Love.

21. The Lamentation of Mary Magdalen.

"Plunged in the wave of mortal distress." This poem consists of one hundred and two seven-line stanzas.



22. The Remedy of Love.

"Seeing the manifold inconvenience." This poem consists of eighty-one seven-line stanzas.

X23. } The Complaint of Mars and Venus.

X24. } In modern editions these appear as two entirely distinct poems, 'The Complaint of Mars' and 'The Complaint of Venus.'

25. The Letter of Cupid.

"Cupid unto whose commandment." This poem consists of sixty-eight seven-line stanzas.

26. A Ballade in Commendation of our Lady.

"A thousand stories could I mo rehearse." This poem consists of thirty-five seven-line stanzas. In spite of its title it is not written in ballade form.

John Gower unto the Worthy and Noble King, Henry IV.

27. The Cuckoo and the Nightingale.

To this poem is appended a ballade with its envoy, which can be looked upon as a separate production. It begins with the lines "O lewd book, with thy foul rudeness."

X28. Scogan unto the Lords and Gentlemen of the King's House.

This poem contains, as stated above, the poem of Chaucer on gentility which now goes under the name of 'Gentilesse.'

29. "Sometime the world so steadfast was and stable."

This is the first line of a poem without any title. It consists of three seven-line stanzas and an envoy.

f30. Good Counsel of Chaucer.

"Flee from the press and dwell with soothfastness."

31. Ballade of the Village without Painting.

This is the poem that is now frequently entitled 'Fortune.' The word Village, which formerly appeared in the title, has been of late corrected into Visage.

32. Lenvoye.

"To-broken ben the statutes high in heaven." This is the poetical address to Scogan, which in modern editions is called 'L'Envoy to Scogan.'

33. "Go forth, king, rule thee by sapience."

This is the first line of a poem without any title. It consists of two seven-line stanzas.

x 34. Chaucer unto his Empty Purse.

The short envoy accompanying this, addressed to the king, is printed in the first editions as if it were a separate production.

35. "Consider well every circumstance."

This is the first line of a poem of seventeen seven-line stanzas, which has no title of its own in this edition. It is the last poem in the book, with the exception of the Latin epitaph of Surigon which follows the colophon.

This is the list of Chaucer's works as it appears in the folio of 1532. But it does not include everything which was contained in that volume, though it does include all pieces that are mentioned in its table of contents. But immediately after that table, and just before the 'Canterbury Tales,' came the following poems:

36. Eight Goodly Questions with their Answers.

"Sometime in Greece, that noble region." This poem consists of nine seven-line stanzas.

37. To the King's most Noble Grace, and to the Lords and Knights of the Garter.

"To you well<sup>1</sup> of honor and of worthiness." This poem contains eight eight-line stanzas.

Then follow without any heading what are apparently two verses of one poem. Upon examination, they turn out to be three separate short pieces. The first consists of six lines, the others of four each. They begin with the lines found below:

38. "When faith faileth in priestes saws."

39. "It falleth for a gentleman."

40. "It cometh by kind of gentle blood."

The first of these appears in modern editions with the title of 'Chaucer's Prophecy'; the other two are usually

<sup>1</sup> Printed *wese* in edition of 1532; corrected in edition of 1542.

discarded. The position of these five pieces in the volume was a peculiar one. They were, perhaps, assigned to it originally in order to fill up a blank space. But if the place given them at the beginning of the folio of 1532 was the result of accident, it continued to be held by them in all the subsequent folios as a right. In every one of them, including even that of Urry, they appear following the table of contents, and preceding the 'Canterbury Tales.' The three last pieces, consisting all together of but fourteen lines, had been printed by Caxton at the close of a volume containing 'Anelida and Arcite,' and the 'Complaint to his Purse.'<sup>1</sup> It was from this quarter, doubtless, that Thynne obtained them for his edition.

Two of the pieces, hitherto unmentioned, contained in the folio of 1532—'The Lamentation of Mary Magdalen' and 'La Belle Dame sans Mercy'—had, however, previously appeared in Pynson's edition of 1526. The latter is there spoken of as having been translated out of the French by Geoffrey Chaucer, flower of poets. It is a natural assumption that it was from that quarter that Thynne borrowed them for his own volume. Still, it is a noticeable fact that two other pieces, published in this same edition of Pynson, were not included in the fuller one that followed it. They were entitled, respectively, 'The Letter of Dido to Æneas' and 'Moral Proverbs of Chaucer.'<sup>2</sup> This latter production began with the line, "The great virtues of our elders notable."

<sup>1</sup> Described by Mr. Bradshaw in the *Trial Forewords to Chaucer's Minor Poems*, p. 118.

list of contents of Pynson's edition given in the preface to Urry's edition. Pynson's edition I have never seen.

<sup>2</sup> This statement is based upon the

They were never included in any other edition. It seems certain that they must have been deliberately rejected by Thynne as not being the composition of Chaucer. If this be true, it shows that the practice had even then begun to exist of ascribing to the poet pieces the authorship of which was unknown. It was not, therefore, the first editor who was wholly responsible for the additions which were made. It also follows that, after a fashion, he did exercise discrimination in the selection of what was to be regarded as genuine, however hard it may sometimes seem to reconcile with any such conduct the results that were reached.

The folio of 1532 was followed by a new edition in 1542. The volume was little more than a reprint, but to it was made a single addition. This was the fierce attack upon the Roman Catholic church which goes under the name of

#### 41. The Plowman's Tale.

There is every reason to think, as will be seen later, that this poem was excluded from the first folio by the interposition of persons in authority. Within two or three years after 1532 it was, however, printed by Godfray, and brought out as an independent publication. From this edition, of which only one copy is now known to exist,<sup>1</sup> it was adopted into the folio of 1542. In that it directly followed the Parson's tale, and therefore took its place as the last of the 'Canterbury Tales.' But it is perfectly evident from what is said in the work itself that the Parson's tale was intended by the poet to be

<sup>1</sup> H. Bradshaw in a note to Thynne's *Animadversions*, p. 101.

the concluding one of the series on the journey to the shrine of the saint. The introduction of this new piece, therefore, necessitated a rearrangement, which was carried out in the next edition that appeared. This is undated, but is ascribed to about the year 1550. In that, the Plowman's tale was given a place before the Parson's, leaving the latter once more at the end of the work, as it stands in all the manuscripts. A further alteration was, in consequence, rendered necessary. In order to secure consistency, the correctness of the text was sacrificed. The first line of the prologue to the Parson's tale is properly as follows :

“By this the manciple had his tale ended.”

In this third collective edition the word “manciple” was arbitrarily struck out, and “plowman” substituted; and it was not till Tyrwhitt's edition that the genuine reading was restored.

These are all the variations of importance that can be found in the three earliest folios. In 1561, an edition was brought out which was remarkable for its insertion of new matter, purporting to be the production of the poet. It seems probable that there was no intention at the outset to do anything more than supply an immediate demand for Chaucer's works by simply reproducing what had already been published. The contents of the previous folios appear in this volume and in their precise order. These, with the exception of the Plowman's tale just noted, had been the same throughout. But some time during the progress of the work the aid of the antiquary Stow appears to have



been asked. He was a thoroughly honest man, and he had the profoundest reverence for Chaucer. But as was not unnatural, he esteemed him fully as much for his antiquity as for his poetry. In the former he was a good deal of a proficient; in the latter, neither his judgment nor his taste was such as to render his opinion worth regarding. However, he found a publisher with as little discernment as himself, or at any rate one with no scrupulousness. The material he had raked together was printed. As a result, he added twenty-eight double-column pages of verse to what had before been accepted as Chaucer's production. In the body of the work, apparently to fill up a vacant space, two short poems ascribed to Lydgate were introduced. They were of seven lines each, and were in their reputed author's genuinely dull and moralizing manner.<sup>1</sup> These, in turn, were followed by a similar one of precisely the same length and of the same quality. To this last no writer's name was attached. The responsibility for its composition fell naturally, therefore, upon Chaucer. Its place was immediately before 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale,' and it was entitled

42. Balade de bon Consail.

"If it befall that God thee lust visit."

The new pieces which were added by Stow, however, with the exception just quoted, were not intermingled with the old. They were appended to the previous collection. On folio 340 of the edition of 1561 began

<sup>1</sup> On folio cccxxii, immediately following Gower's poem addressed to Henry IV.

the additions which had been collected with a zeal that bore a very remote relation to knowledge. "Here followeth," runs the heading, "certain works of Geoffrey Chaucer, which hath not heretofore been printed, and are gathered and added to this book by John Stowe."<sup>1</sup> The first poem on the list is no other than the one now usually entitled 'Gentilesse,' which had been included in the address of Scogan to the lords and gentlemen of the king's house. It will therefore not receive a separate numbering. The titles of the pieces are as follows:

- (28.) A Ballade made by Chaucer, teaching what is gentleness, or whom is worthy to be called gentle.

"The first stock father of gentleness."

43. } A Proverb against Covetise and Negligence.  
44. }

These are really two proverbs of four lines each. The first is directed against negligence, and begins with the line, "What shal these clothes thus manifold." The second against covetousness begins, "Of all this world the large compass."

45. A Ballade which Chaucer made against Women Unconstant.

"Madame, for your newfangleness." It is a ballade of three seven-line stanzas.

46. Here followeth a Ballade which Chaucer made in the Praise, or rather Dispraise of Women for their Doubleness.

"This world is full of variance." It is a poem of twelve eight-line stanzas with an envoy. Not in ballade form.

47. The work following was compiled by Chaucer, and is called The Craft of Lovers.

"Moralize a similitude who list their ballads sue." The poem consists of twenty-three seven-line stanzas.

<sup>1</sup> Collier, in his *Bibliographical Account of Early English Literature*, strangely says that, while this edition is said to have been edited by

Stow, "his name is nowhere found in it." See vol. i., page 159 (American reprint).

## 48. A Ballade.

"Of their nature they greatly then delight." This poem consists of four seven-line stanzas. Not in ballade form.

## 49. The Ten Commandments of Love.

"Certes far extendeth yet my reason." This poem consists of twelve seven-line stanzas with an envoy of two stanzas.

## 50. The Nine Ladies Worthy.

"Refulgent in preciousness, O Sinope, the queen." This poem consists of nine seven-line stanzas.

## 51. Alone walking.

This is the first line of a virelay of forty lines, which has no title.

## 52. A Ballade.

"In the season of Feverere, when it was full cold." This poem consists of seven seven-line stanzas. Not in ballade form.

## 53. A Ballade.

"O merciful and O mercurial." This poem consists of twelve seven-line stanzas. Not in ballade form.

## 54. Here followeth how Mercury with Pallas, Venus, and Minerva appeared to Paris of Troy, he sleeping by a fountain.

"Son of Priamus, gentle Paris of Troy." The poem consists of four seven-line stanzas.

## 55. A Ballade Pleasant.

"I have a lady, whereso she be." At the end the poem is called 'The Describing of a Fair Lady.' It consists of seven seven-line stanzas. Not in ballade form.

## 56. Another Ballade.

"O mossy quince hanging by your stalk." This poem consists of three seven-line stanzas. Not in ballade form.

## 57. A Ballade, warning men to beware of Deceitful Women.

"Look well about, ye that lovers be." This poem consists of six seven-line stanzas. Partially in ballade form.

## 58. These verses next following were compiled by Geoffrey Chaucer, and in the written copies followeth at the end of the Complaint of Pity.

"The longe nightes when every creature." The running title at the head of the page is 'The Complaint of Pity.'

59. A Ballade, declaring that Women's Chastity doth much excel all treasure worldly.

"In womanhead as authors all write." This poem consists of eight seven-line stanzas. Not in ballade form.

60. The Court of Love.

61. Chaucer's Words unto his own Scrivener.

After this followed the Latin epitaph of Surigon, and then, for the first time, Lydgate's 'Story of Thebes' made its appearance as a sort of supplementary 'Canterbury Tale.'

The bulk of Chaucer's supposed production was still further increased in the edition of Speght that followed in 1598. The additions in this instance were, on the whole, more important than any which had previously been made. For them it is pretty certain that Stow was also responsible, in spite of the fact that Speght assures us he had been long engaged in amassing materials for the illustration of the poet's life and writings. A claim to this effect was directly asserted by the antiquary in his 'Annals.' But it is unnecessary to go for testimony outside of the volume itself. In this, as in the previous edition, folio 340 marks the dividing-line between the collections of Thynne and those of Stow. The heading of 1561 is repeated with slight variations. "Here followeth," it reads, "certain works of Geoffrey Chaucer, annexed to the impression printed in the year 1561. With an addition of some things of Chaucer's writing, never before this time printed, 1597. All collected and adjoined to his former works by John Stowe."

The pieces added in this edition were but two in

number; but in the life and literary history of Chaucer they have played a part quite out of proportion to their intrinsic importance. The following are their titles:

62. Chaucer's Dream.

63. The Flower and the Leaf.

The insertion of the first of these poems gave to Chaucer two works with essentially the same title. On folio 244 appeared 'The Dream of Chaucer;' on folio 355, 'Chaucer's Dream.' The latter poem is introduced with the remark that the work which had previously gone under this name was really 'The Book of the Duchess,' or 'The Death of Blanche.' This was true enough. Unhappily the knowledge exhibited on this point was confined to the part of the volume containing the text. It failed to be displayed in the part containing the biography. Among the works of the poet there put down as "never before published," was one entitled *In Obitu Blanche Ducissæ*. This, said his muddled editor, "seemeth rather to be his Dream: and that other called his Dream, The Complaint for Blanche: as after the perusing of them both any mean reader will judge." The dramatist Beaumont, a student and admirer of the poet, was led to adopt this view, which is absolutely inconsistent with any knowledge of the two works. In his letter to Speght, prefixed to the folio of 1598, he spoke of the 'Death of Blanche' as having never yet been printed. Still, no change was ever made in any of the folio editions of Chaucer's works that followed. The result was that the designation of two distinct poems by a title practically the same led to a confusion which,



manifesting itself, as we have seen, at the earliest possible moment, occasionally continued to manifest itself for centuries.

Two other pieces had come too late to be included in this volume, though not too late to be considered in the biography prefixed to it. They were specifically mentioned in a marginal note on the section giving an account of the poet's writings. "' Jack Upland,'" it said, "is supposed to be his. But the A. B. C. called *Priere de nostre Dame* is certainly Chaucer's doing." The latter of these is a poem, the former a prose work, though it has once enjoyed the distinction of being printed as alliterative verse.<sup>1</sup> They were added to the edition of 1602, with the following headings:

64. Chaucer's A. B. C., called *La Priere de nostre Dame*: made, as some say, at the request of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, as a prayer for her private use, being a woman in her religion very devout.
65. Jacke Upland. In this treatise is set forth the blind ignorance and variable discord of the Churchmen, how rude and unskilful they were in matters and principles of our Christian institution. This is thought to be that Creed which the Pelican speaketh of in the Plowman's tale in these words:

" Of friars I have told before,  
In a making of a Creed,  
And yet I could tell worse and more,  
But men would wearyen it to read."

These titles embrace everything attributed to Chaucer by the sixteenth-century editors. At this point, there-

<sup>1</sup> By Thomas Wright in *Political Poems and Songs* (Rolls Series, 1861), vol. ii., p. 16.

fore, it is desirable to stop sufficiently long to ascertain, with some approach to exactness, the extent of the body of verse which he was then believed to have produced. Thynne's two folios of 1532 and 1542 necessarily take precedence. The poems included in them, about the genuineness of which there has never been any dispute, number between thirty-four and thirty-five thousand lines. The 'Romance of the Rose' added about seventy-seven hundred lines. The spurious and doubtful poems, accepted by Thynne as genuine, increased the whole number by over seven thousand more. Accordingly, nearly fifty thousand lines represented the extent of Chaucer's poetical production, as it appeared in his second edition of 1542. Stow, who had the true antiquarian taste for quantity, not quality, did all that lay in his power to rival his predecessor. The wheat had been pretty thoroughly garnered before he had an opportunity to put in his sickle. He could not do much in consequence; but he did all he could. His additions to the folio of 1561 amounted to a few more than twenty-five hundred lines. About three thousand more were furnished by him to the two editions that followed. It is probable that had he been allowed to have his way unchecked, the number would have mounted far higher. Speght's language certainly seems to imply that he had successfully resisted the importunity of his antiquarian friend to swell the collection still further by the addition of pieces of doubtful character. "Others I have seen," he writes, "without any author's name in the hands of Mr. Stow, that painful antiquary, which for the invention I would verily judge to be Chaucer's, were

it not that words and phrases carry not everywhere Chaucer's antiquity." A tendency to scrutinize the genuineness of many of these pieces had, in fact, begun to show itself. It had already succeeded in striking some from the list. The feeling was gradually springing up that it was not desirable to make the volume purporting to contain the poet's works a sort of dumping-ground for all the rymes, good, bad, or indifferent, that for a century past or more had been begotten by the ragged regiment of versifiers, and were circulating in manuscript without any responsible author. It did not, however, amount to much beyond a protest. The more than thirty-four thousand undisputed lines swelled, as we have seen, during the sixteenth century, under the hands of successive editors, to a little less than fifty-five thousand.

It was as the author of this vast body of verse that Chaucer appeared at the opening of the seventeenth century; for, with the exception of Lydgate's 'Story of Thebes,' everything found in the edition of 1602 was popularly ascribed to him, even in the few cases in which the name of the real author had come to be attached to the piece. There sprang up, moreover, a general impression that much of the poet's production still remained unpublished. References, in particular, were made to a mysterious manuscript in the Arundel-House library which was reported to contain the conclusion of the Squire's tale. This general expectation led to some efforts to secure any or all of these missing works, when the folio of 1687 made its appearance. They were unsuccessful. This edition, in consequence, was essentially nothing but a reprint of that of 1602. But it

pretended to be a great deal more. Its title-page not only professed that the text had been lately compared with the best manuscripts, but that several things had been added that had never yet appeared in print. This was a particularly impudent falsehood. Not a line of verse was added to the body of the work. On the very last page there was an advertisement to the effect that, as the volume was on the point of being finished, a manuscript had been found which contained the conclusion of the Cook's and of the Squire's tale, both of which had previously been described as lost, or as having never been completed. These endings had come too late to be inserted in their proper place. They had therefore been put at the end of the volume. It would not have made the slightest difference as regards Chaucer if they had come too late to be inserted at all. They were equally contemptible in quantity and quality. They were merely bad specimens of those tags or links, found in certain of the manuscripts, which some of the more ambitious scribes seem to have been fond of tacking upon tales for the sake of making an apparent union between two parts that had been left with no connection. Twelve lines were added as the conclusion of the Cook's tale, and ten as that of the Squire's. These so-called conclusions, which do not conclude anything, represent the whole of the "several things added," which the title-page pompously mentioned as having never before been put in print.

The additions made by Urry were of far more consequence. He, or his successors, had the good sense to reject the petty lines just described. These, besides the



worthlessness of the matter contained in them, were, in their style, hardly creditable to the wretchedest poetaster who flourished in the intellectual collapse of the fifteenth century. Lydgate's 'Story of Thebes,' which had been regularly reprinted since 1561, was likewise discarded. For the first time also since Caxton and his immediate successors had published it, the so-called Retractation was appended to the 'Canterbury Tales.' But it was the characteristic of this edition that, whenever it did a good thing one way, it was sure to more than counterbalance it by doing something worse in another. To Chaucer's great work it made several additions which it required peculiar lack of appreciation to attribute to the poet. One of these, however, is even at the present day sometimes retained. It is entitled

66. The Tale of Gamelin.

This followed the unfinished tale of the Cook, and has generally been assigned to that character, though Urry justly felt that it ought properly to be given to the Yeoman. It is found in as many at least as ten of the manuscripts, one of them being the well-known Harleian Manuscript 7334.<sup>1</sup> How it chanced to obtain a place in these is a point we have no means of determining. A common theory is, that it was a production which Chaucer had in hand to use as a groundwork for some poem of his own. Having been left among his papers, it was reproduced as his by one or more of the scribes. The fact of its being contained in so many manuscripts may be

<sup>1</sup> See page xiv. of the Introduction to Professor Skeat's valuable edition of the *Tale of Gamelin*, Oxford, 1884.



regarded by some as a sufficient justification for its insertion by Urry. He subjoined, also, in two instances a few lines, hitherto unprinted, of transition passages between the tales. One of them is clearly the production of Chaucer; the other is as clearly not. As a sort of compensation for the rejection of Lydgate's 'Story of Thebes' he, or the men who succeeded him in the editorship, placed at the end of the work two unmistakably spurious pieces which are found in but a single manuscript. One of these purports to describe what took place after the arrival of the pilgrims at their destination, and was designated

67. The Prologue, or the Merry Adventures of the Pardoner and Tapster at the Inn at Canterbury.

This was followed by a poem entitled

68. The Merchant's Second Tale, or the History of Beryn.

These additions by Urry swelled the volume of verse before attributed to Chaucer by nearly five thousand lines. The whole number for which he was held responsible now reached the neighborhood of sixty thousand.

With Urry, however, the end was nearly reached. His edition was the last that contained new spurious matter of any length; almost the last that contained much new matter at all. Since his time, some pieces have been discovered which on the authority of the scribes, and the evidence furnished by their own character, have been ascribed to the poet; but they are few in number, and not one of them is of great length. They made their appearance in the following order. The first

was a roundel which was printed in 1765 by Percy, in his 'Reliques of Ancient English Poetry,' under the title of 'An Original Ballad of Chaucer.' It is found only in a single manuscript of the Pepyssian collection at Magdalen College, Cambridge. This contains a number of Chaucer's works, and a few that were not his. Consequently, his authorship of this particular piece is not absolutely assured. Still, it seems reasonable to ascribe it to the poet. In the manuscript it occupies the last place, and bears in it the name of

69. Merciless Beauty.

It is not a production of a very high order, and Percy was disposed to apologize for publishing it, partly, to be sure, on account of its artificial form. "The Greek poets," he wrote, "have had their wings and axes; the great father of English poesy may therefore be pardoned one poor solitary rondeau." The piece was not even alluded to by Tyrwhitt, and it was never formally included in any edition of Chaucer's works until that of Robert Bell, about 1856.

The next poem that was added to the list was a religious one, which is usually entitled an

70. Orison to the Holy Virgin,

though it sometimes receives its name from the first three words of its opening line, which reads,

"Mother of God and virgin undefouled."

This piece was first printed by Leyden in 1801, in his edition of 'The Complaint of Scotland.' It was not, however, included in the next two editions of Chaucer's

poetical works. In fact, it appears to have lain entirely unnoticed, until attention was called to it by an anonymous writer, who collated Leyden's reprint with the original, and published it in 1855.<sup>1</sup> It was then included in Bell's edition. It is found in two Scotch manuscripts, in both of which it is ascribed to Chaucer. The evidence of one of them is of very slight value, as it contains several undoubtedly spurious productions which are imputed to the same source. It also appears in a manuscript containing a number of Occleve's poems. On the strength of that fact it has been attributed to him with great positiveness. If it be his, it is altogether of a higher grade of composition than he has elsewhere attained in any of his published writings.

Nothing new ascribed to the poet was added to Singer's edition, which appeared in five volumes in 1822. That scholar, indeed, contributed to it a metrical prayer of four lines. This he had found on the fly-leaf of an old manuscript, where it was appended to a variant form of the poem called 'Chaucer's Prophecy.'<sup>2</sup> What particular reason there was for including it cannot well be guessed, as the Latin title does not ascribe it to Geoffrey Chaucer, but to Thomas Cantuaria. Here it needs only mention; there would be obvious impropriety in enumerating it as an additional production. Nothing more appeared also in the Aldine edition of 1845, which was in six volumes. But in Robert Bell's undated edition, the eight volumes of which came out at intervals from 1855 to 1857, and which for convenience may be dated 1856, the 'Roundel' and the 'Orison to the Holy Virgin,'

<sup>1</sup> In *Notes and Queries*, Aug. 25, 1855.

<sup>2</sup> Nos. 38, 39, 40.

just described, were for the first time included, as has been already mentioned. There was also a slight addition from the manuscripts. Two separate stanzas were appended to the two little pieces about 'Negligence' and 'Covetousness' that had appeared in the edition of 1561.<sup>1</sup> They were all included under the title of 'Proverbs of Chaucer.' The two new ones consisted in each case of seven lines, and began respectively as follows :

71. "The world so wide, the air so remuable."

72. "The more I go, the farther I am behind."

The first of these is ascribed by Ritson to a squire named Halsam, though he adds that it is usually attributed to Lydgate.<sup>2</sup> These two stanzas, the first lines of which have just been given, constitute therefore the only matter hitherto unprinted, that first appeared in this edition.

In Morris's edition, which came out in 1866, three new pieces were added. Two of them were short, and their value corresponded to their length. They each consisted of eight lines, and were entitled respectively,

73. Prosperity.

"Right as poverté causeth soberness."

74. Leaulte Vault Richesse.

"Worldly joy is only fantasy."

The only merit these last four pieces possess is their brevity. While that is a commendable quality, it hardly seems a sufficient justification for imputing them to Chaucer. The case is quite different with another poem which made its first appearance in this edition. It was

<sup>1</sup> Nos. 43 and 44.

<sup>2</sup> Ritson, *Bibliographica Poetica*, p. 57.



discovered by the late Mr. Bradshaw and printed from his transcript. It is a production of exceeding beauty, though, unfortunately, rendered defective by the loss of a single line, which is wanting in both of the only two manuscripts of the piece that are known to exist. In one of these it is entitled *Prima Ætas*. With this heading it was first published. The name now ordinarily given to it is,

75. The Former Age,

which are the very words used in the poem itself at the end of the second line. It is suggested by, and partly paraphrased from, the fifth metre of the second book of Boethius on the 'Consolation of Philosophy.' Internal evidence would make us reasonably confident that it was a production of Chaucer's, even were there no actual proof of the fact; but in both of the manuscripts it is attributed to him, so that there can be no real ground for doubt. The poem is written in the eight-line stanza, and of these it contains eight.

Two more pieces were ascribed to Chaucer by Professor Skeat in his edition of the 'Minor Poems' which appeared in 1888. One of these is a poem of thirteen seven-line stanzas, and is entitled

76. An Amorous Complaint made at Windsor.

"I, which that am the sorrowfulest man."

There is no manuscript or other authority for ascribing this to Chaucer. Perhaps the greatest objection to so considering it is, that it has almost too many of his peculiar phrases for a poem of less than a hundred lines. With these it is fairly running over. It almost gives the impression of a cento collected from his various writings



by an ardent admirer, and one especially familiar with 'Troilus and Cressida.' Still, it may be Chaucer's own work. Hardly so much can be said of the second addition, which is a poem of three seven-line stanzas, entitled

77. A Ballade of Complaint.

This is a piece of inferior literary merit. There is hardly any just ground for including it among Chaucer's writings without positive evidence of some sort, and so far nothing of that nature has been produced.

The foregoing titles—seventy-seven in number—comprise everything that has ever been included at any time in any collection of Chaucer's writings. Other pieces, turned up by scholars rummaging among ancient manuscripts, have occasionally been imputed to him. His claim to their authorship, however, has rarely been maintained save by the man who made the discovery. Todd, for instance, in his 'Illustrations of the Lives and Writings of Gower and Chaucer,' printed two poems of peculiar wretchedness, which he was determined to foist upon the poet. He, moreover, felt and expressed extreme confidence as to the time of their composition. This he considered to be the period of the imaginary imprisonment in the Tower. The reasons for coming to these conclusions about the poems are much more interesting than the poems themselves. They are very suggestive of the line of argument adopted by later writers about other productions the date of which an effort has been made to ascertain. The poems were found in two leaves preceding a fifteenth-century manuscript of the 'Canterbury Tales.' The hand in which they were written was, to be sure, not the same as that of

the work which followed, but it was certainly coeval with it. The second and longer of the two pieces, which consisted of one hundred and twenty lines, was evidently intended as a panegyric upon one of the noble house of Vere. The person complimented was, according to Todd, Sir Robert Vere, Earl of Oxford, the favorite of Richard II. He was the channel through which the favors of the king were at one time dispensed. To him it was therefore natural that the poet should apply in his distress. This view was further strengthened by the fact that Chaucer's imprisonment corresponded with the period when the power of Vere was at its highest. Consequently, the poems were the work of Chaucer. This comprises the whole of the evidence that was adduced to support a proposition which was put forth as if it scarcely admitted of doubt. The critical capacity of many men seems to become absolutely staggered the moment their eyes chance upon a piece of English spelled in a manner different from that to which they are accustomed. On no other ground does it appear possible to account for a scholar like Todd ascribing to Chaucer productions which could be safely rejected as spurious for reasons purely literary, were there none besides. On no other ground can we account for Singer accepting these verses as the work of the poet, and declaring that they "not only in point of style bear strong marks of authenticity, but include a passage that seems evidently to allude to the 'Testament of Love' as the one great business of his prison solitude." We cannot, of course, refuse to believe that Chaucer composed something merely because it is inferior to his other writings, or

because it is poor in itself. But, in justice to his memory, we have the right to insist that he shall not be made responsible for wretched pieces which men choose to attribute to him, unless they choose at the same time to furnish something in the shape of evidence that he wrote them. Fortunately, at the period when these productions were printed the labors of Tyrwhitt had begun to bear some fruit. The business of degrading the poetical reputation of Chaucer for the sake of adding to the reputation for research of his editors and commentators had about run its course. The generation which accepted the story of his imprisonment could not, or at least did not, accept these poems supposed to be written during it, though Todd looked upon them as "a discovery of some importance." He remarked very truly that "to our most curious antiquaries they are unknown." He might have added just as truly that, as the work of Chaucer, they were destined to remain forever unknown.

We come now to the history of the times in which, and of the methods by which, the spurious matter has, to some extent at least, been separated from the genuine. The poetry of Chaucer, avowed by himself as his own and never disputed to be his, amounted, as we have seen, to between thirty-four and thirty-five thousand lines. This, of course, excludes the existing version of the 'Romance of the Rose.' In the editions that had successively appeared, the quantity of verse had been increased by about twenty-five thousand lines. It must not be supposed that this vast augmentation had taken place without any protest. Even in the uncritical six-

teenth century men had been found to doubt the genuineness of some of the pieces included in the volume purporting to contain the writings of Chaucer. It is probable that, in regard to certain other productions alleged to be his, doubt or denial existed which has left of itself no record. Leland's authority, worthless as it is in most respects, is in this matter of some value. He specifically asserts that one of the pieces in his list, the 'Flower of Courtesy,'<sup>1</sup> was rejected by many as spurious. It did not require peculiar sagacity to reach this conclusion. The piece, it is true, could only have been composed by one who was familiar with the poet's writings, especially with the 'Parliament of Fowls.' This it imitates everywhere. In two places it uses almost its very words. But the question is settled decisively by the fact that the writer of the 'Flower of Courtesy' tells us that Chaucer is dead, and expresses the sense of his own incapacity to equal him. It was reserved for Stow—or at least for the edition of 1561—to attribute this work to Lydgate. To him also, in this same folio, was given the credit of the composition of the poem, previously without title, which begins with "Consider well every circumstance."<sup>2</sup> It was there called a 'Ballade of Good Counsel,' and was said to have been translated out of the Latin.

Of any claim to the composition of these two pieces Chaucer, not at all to the injury of his reputation, was now deprived. They, however, continued to be retained in all the future folios. These, indeed, never set out to reject anything, no matter how much they added.

<sup>1</sup> No. 11.

<sup>2</sup> No. 35.



Speght's first edition of 1598 made a still further advance. It declared the spuriousness of the 'Letter of Cupid.' This is the production which was written, as it said itself, in the year 1402. It had, in consequence, led some before this time to doubt the truth of the statement that the poet died in 1400. "This 'Letter of Cupid,'" wrote Speght, "is none of Chaucer's doing, but was composed by Thomas Occleve of the privy seal."

I have already pointed out that Speght, in his second edition, had to some extent the help of Francis Thynne. Among the other reasons which lead us to regret that the latter never completed or published his projected commentary upon Chaucer is the certainty that he would have made some effort to separate the spurious matter from the genuine. Instead of the confused heap of rubbish that Stow and his successors heaped up, we should have had the critical estimate of that age as to what was and what was not the production of the poet. It might not in all cases have commanded our assent, but it would never have been unworthy of our consideration. Thynne had this point clearly in view. "One other thing is," he wrote, "that it would be good that Chaucer's proper works were distinguished from the adulterate, and such as were not his, as the 'Testament of Cressida,' the 'Letter of Cupid,' and the ballade beginning 'I have a lady wherso she be,' &c., which Chaucer never composed,<sup>2</sup> as may sufficiently be proved by the things themselves." Under the circumstances the "&c." is to be regretted, as is usually the case with that contraction. In Speght's second edition no further attempt

<sup>1</sup> No. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Nos. 4, 25, and 55.



of the kind indicated was made. Rather it should be said that the one attempt which apparently was made contributed to confuse rather than clear up the subject. In the folio of 1602 Occleve was credited with the authorship of the poet's well-known 'Complaint to his Purse.' It so appeared likewise in the folio of 1687, and it was not until the publication of Urry's edition that the piece was restored to its rightful owner. This change of attribution is a somewhat inexplicable procedure, though Chaucer's 'Complaint to his Purse,' it must be conceded, is not on a level with most of his productions. Still, it is above the capacity of Occleve.

The 'Testament of Cressida'<sup>1</sup> was the next work to be discarded. Its insertion in the first place seems almost to have been a matter of chance. It was certainly made at the last moment. This is evident from the paging of the edition of 1532, in which this piece originally made its appearance. 'Troilus and Cressida,' which precedes it, ended on folio 219. The intention was clearly to have that work followed by the 'Legend of Good Women,' with a separate title-page of its own. But in order to make room for the new poem which had come to hand, the original folio 219 was cancelled and a new one substituted. This contained the conclusion of 'Troilus and Cressida' and the beginning of the 'Testament of Cressida.' The latter extended also over the three following folios. These were all left unnumbered, with the result that the 'Legend of Good Women,' though shorn of its intended title-page, began, as in the first place, with folio 220. Having thus got a footing

<sup>1</sup> No. 4.

among Chaucer's writings, the 'Testament of Cressida' long continued to retain its place among them with little question, though, as we have just seen, the younger Thynne recognized the spurious nature of the production. This could easily have been determined from the peculiarities of the dialect. But there was no necessity of resorting to evidence of this kind. The author of the poem tells us positively that he wrote it as a continuation of 'Troilus and Cressida.' He also tells us precisely, and somewhat prosaically, how he came to write it. The season of Lent had come. The weather had been made bitterly cold by fierce winds from the North. As a refuge from the inclemency of nature, he went his way to his chamber, mended the fire, and took some drink to comfort his spirits and arm himself against the chill outside air. Then, to make the night short, he gave himself up to the perusal of a book "written by worthy Chaucer glorious." As that poet had failed to furnish any account of the fate of Cressida, he set out to remedy this neglect, and wrote in consequence her 'Testament and Complaint.'

There was still other evidence that it was not a composition of Chaucer's besides that to be gained from its contents. It appeared as an independent work at least twice before the end of the sixteenth century, and bore on the title-page the name of its author. This was Robert Henryson, one of those early writers whom Scottish patriotism struggles energetically to consider a poet. It is one of many proofs of the little communication that then existed between the two portions of the island, that, though hundreds and even thousands of volumes of

Henryson's poems were printed then and afterwards at Edinburgh, not a sufficient number of copies ever strayed southwards to cause the real authorship of the poem to become generally known.<sup>1</sup> Nor was the discovery, when made, due to the acquaintance of English scholars with the published work. It was communicated to them, not ascertained by them. Sir Francis Kynaston, who, in 1635, brought out the first and second books of 'Troilus and Cressida' with a ryming Latin translation, wrote also a commentary upon the work. In this he mentioned that he had been informed by Sir James Erskine "and diverse aged scholars of the Scottish nation" that the 'Testament of Cressida' was not the composition of Chaucer, but of "one Mr. Robert Henderson, chief schoolmaster of Dumferlin." This commentary was never printed, but Urry had access to the manuscript containing it. The poem, in consequence, appeared in his edition credited for the first time to the proper author.<sup>2</sup>

The next work to go was the 'Plowman's Tale.'<sup>3</sup> Of

<sup>1</sup> The testimony of the Edinburgh booksellers shows that over two thousand copies of Henryson's *Testament of Cressida* were in existence as late as 1602; but of these a solitary copy of the edition of 1593 is all that is known to be extant. (*Poems of Robert Henryson*, edited by David Laing, 1865, p. 259.)

<sup>2</sup> Urry or his successors made no mention of Kynaston, and accordingly gave the impression that it was Urry to whom the information had been communicated. The statement naturally misled Tyrwhitt.

<sup>3</sup> No. 41. This poem was reprinted by Wright from Speght in his *Political Poems and Songs*, 1859

(vol. i., pp. 304-346), but without the sixty introductory lines of its prologue. These lines describe the Plowman as having left his plow and work, and as having started on a pilgrimage on foot. They also give the conversation between him and the Host. If this prologue is genuine—and this, in spite of Mr. Furnivall's disbelief (Thynne's *Animadversions*, 1875, note to p. 69), there seems no reason to doubt—there can be but little question that the poem was originally composed by some one as a sort of supplementary Canterbury tale. This would require for its composition a later date than that given by Wright, which is 1393 or 1394, or

all the spurious productions attributed to Chaucer this is, in certain ways, much the most noted. From the outset it has had a singular history of its own. Still, it is in the history of the religious opinions ascribed to the poet that it has played the most prominent part—a part, however, that is quite independent of any interest which belongs to it as a purely literary creation. About it, in consequence, there has prevailed from the beginning more or less of controversy. In particular, in the account given of its insertion in the volume containing Chaucer's works, it seems to have been early confused with another poem called the 'Pilgrim's Tale.' The story of both must therefore be recounted before we can arrive at the probable truth in regard to the more important of the two. While it is a matter about which certainty cannot be attained at this late day, a careful examination of the whole question can hardly lead to any but one conclusion. The important thing to bear in mind before entering upon the discussion is that the 'Plowman's Tale' did not appear in Thynne's first edition of 1532, but did in that of 1542, when the Protestant Reformation was much further advanced.

that by Professor Skeat, which is 1395. (See Preface to his edition of *Piers the Plowman's Crede*, p. xvi.). The evidence of language seems to me, also, to indicate a later time for its composition than these dates imply. Nor can I think the remark of the writer, that he had told before of the friars "in the making of a Creed" (compare the argument to *Jack Upland*, p. 443, where his lines are quoted in full), can be deemed undoubted or even very convincing proof that he was himself the author of the

Creed to which he pretty certainly refers. If he were familiar with it, as there is every reason to believe, he would naturally adopt its phraseology and copy its expressions. One of the queer results of including the *Plowman's Tale* and *Jack Upland* among Chaucer's works is that Chaucer himself has been spoken of by some as the author of *Piers the Plowman's Creed*, and, in fact, has been charged by others with having fraudulently made claim to its composition.



When, towards the end of the sixteenth century, Francis Thynne came to write some recollections of the work his father did in editing Chaucer, he had a curious story to tell about a missing production, which he called the 'Pilgrim's Tale.' He had never seen it himself, though he was familiar with its opening lines. From the discourse of those who had read it, he was enabled, however, to give some idea of its general character, or rather his idea of what it was. It was marked, according to his account, by the excessive bitterness of its attacks upon the bishops for their pride, covetousness, and extortion; nor did it spare the inferior members of the spiritual hierarchy or the officials of the spiritual courts. He further informs us that the edition of Chaucer's works which the elder Thynne first prepared contained this poem. The volume in which it was included had only one column to the page. But, though printed wholly or in part, it was never published. The way this result was brought about can be best told in the words of the narrator. "This tale," says Francis Thynne, "when King Henry the Eighth had read, he called my father unto him, saying, 'William Thynne, I doubt this will not be allowed; for I suspect the bishops will call thee in question for it.' To whom my father, being in great favor with his prince (as many yet living can testify), said, 'If your grace be not offended, I hope to be protected by you:' whereupon the King bid him go his way and fear not. All which notwithstanding, my father was called in question by the bishops, and heaved at by Cardinal Wolsey, his old enemy for many causes, but mostly for that my father had furthered Skelton to publish his 'Colin Clout'



against the Cardinal, the most part of which book was compiled in my father's house at Erith in Kent. But for all my father's friends, the Cardinal's persuading authority was so great with the King, that though by the King's favor my father escaped bodily danger, yet the Cardinal caused the King so much to mislike of that tale, that Chaucer must be new printed and that discourse of the Pilgrim's tale left out. And so being printed again, some things were forced to be omitted, and the Plowman's tale (supposed but untruly to be made by old Sir Thomas Wyatt, father to him which was executed in the first year of Queen Mary, and not by Chaucer) with much ado permitted to pass with the rest, in such sort that in one open parliament (as I have heard Sir John Thynne report, being then a member of the house), when talk was had of books to be forbidden, Chaucer had there forever been condemned, had it not been that his works had been counted but fables."

This was Thynne's story. Though not then published, it must have been communicated in private, for it at once directed attention to the missing tale. Speght, who had known nothing about such a work in 1598, said, in his edition of 1602, that search was to be made for it. If this were successful, it would appear in that work upon Chaucer which Francis Thynne had in hand. The poem, however, eluded whatever efforts were made to find it for more than two centuries. The publisher of the edition of 1687 tells us that in order to procure it he had examined in vain the libraries of both universities, and also all private libraries to which he could have access. The editors of the next edition did no

more than record the failures which had attended the previous attempts. Tyrwhitt, however, was more fortunate. He chanced upon a fragment of the tale, consisting of about seven hundred and fifty lines. It was printed in black letter, and was thought by him to have once formed part of a volume of miscellaneous pieces. After having been examined by him, it again disappeared from view, but was finally rediscovered and printed by the Chaucer Society in 1875. The sight of it had at once destroyed any value that might have been deemed to belong to it as one of the poet's productions supposed to have been lost. There were several references to persons and events much later than his time. The poem was the work of a man, indeed, who was thoroughly familiar with the works of Chaucer, though he had failed to imbibe any inspiration from the contact. He mentions him by name, and quotes frequently from his writings. But the important fact which Tyrwhitt pointed out was, that the 'Pilgrim's Tale' must have been composed after the edition of 1532 had appeared. Its author, in mentioning Jack Straw and Perkin Warbeck, adds to the names of these popular leaders,

"And now of late our Cobbler the daw."

This is a distinct reference to a monk calling himself Captain Cobbler, who, in 1536, headed an insurrection of Lincolnshire rebels. This settles the date of composition, unless the couplet containing this line could be supposed an interpolation, as some have thought possible. But this view is not tenable. Tyrwhitt had pointed out,

as an additional proof of the lateness of its composition, that the 'Romance of the Rose' was quoted by leaf and page, the regular proceeding in the case of a printed book, but unusual, if not unprecedented, in the case of a manuscript. Had he cared to examine the matter further, he would have discovered the very printed book to which the reference is made. In the course of the tale, the narrator represents himself as asking the man with whom he is conversing a question, which the latter tells him he dares not, and which no one since has had the ability, or, at any rate, has taken the pains, to answer. Instead of that, he

"Bad me read the Romaunt of the Rose;  
The third leaf just from the end,  
To the second page, there he did me send."

His instructor goes on to explain the meaning of the passage about the wolf, which the questioner will find in the place to which he has sent him. He quotes further from the 'Romance of the Rose' six lines, which he is careful to declare are not his own, but Chaucer's.

This reference to page and leaf proves what volume it was that the author of the 'Pilgrim's Tale' had in mind. It was the edition of Chaucer's works printed in 1532. In that edition, on the third leaf from the end of the 'Romance of the Rose,' and on its second page, are contained all the matters to which attention is directed in the passage which has just been considered. There is the place in which the wolf is mentioned. There are to be found the six quoted lines. Modern editions do not help us here, or rather they mislead us; for the verses in

them do not in this place follow the order in which they appear in the early printed editions.<sup>1</sup>

This disposes effectually of Thynne's story that the 'Pilgrim's Tale' could have been included in the first edition that his father projected. His words, indeed, convey the further impression that in the first edition which his father actually published, the 'Plowman's Tale' was included. This, no one now needs to be told, was an error. But it seems hardly reasonable to discredit his account as a whole, because its narrator was mistaken in some of its details. There could have been no motive for him to misrepresent the facts. He could have had, and probably did have, access to the best of authorities upon the subject. He was young when his father died; but it is reasonable to assume that it was from those who had themselves heard some such story from the first editor's lips that he learned what he here tells. Lapse of time would have left the particulars of the transaction confused in his mind, while its main outlines would have been preserved. Other things, too, had taken place which would have a tendency, as years went by, to be confounded by a failing memory with what had once been familiar. The 'Pilgrim's Tale,' with other pieces, had been printed before the middle of the sixteenth century in the volume already described as having been discovered by Tyrwhitt. This either bore Chaucer's

<sup>1</sup> The second page of the third folio from the end of the *Romance of the Rose*, as it appears in the edition of 1532, comprises the passage extending from line 7251 to 7343 of the early printed editions. These correspond to the lines in Morris's edition numbered and appearing in the following order: from 7299 to 7305, from 7161 to 7208, and from 7306 to 7343—all inclusive. The lines in Morris's edition are somewhat incorrectly numbered, however, as will be pointed out later.



name on its title-page, or its contents came speedily to be attributed to him. The latter fact we know from the additional list of the poet's writings which Bale, in his account of English writers, published in 1548, appended to Leland's original catalogue. In that work, besides some other titles, are specified the 'Pilgrim's Tale' and the 'Court of Venus.' The latter piece as well as the former had appeared in the book just mentioned, of which only a portion has been preserved. There is nothing violent in the supposition that this poem, which in Thynne's time had disappeared from actual view and lived only in memory, should have been mixed up by him with another poem, the fortunes of which he had heard told by his father or his father's friends. No fragment of a sixteenth-century edition of Chaucer with one column to a page has indeed ever been seen. But this would not be in the least strange in the case of a volume suppressed before publication; in fact, in the case of such a volume printed so long ago, it would be strange if any fragment of it had been preserved to our time. But we can concede the statement about the one-column book to have been an error, without losing confidence in the main fact which the words of Thynne bring to light. This is that the first projected edition of Chaucer's works set out to include a poem which was so offensive to the adherents of the Roman Catholic faith that measures were taken to prevent its publication. If Wolsey were the main agent in bringing about this result, the work must have been in preparation long before it actually appeared; for Wolsey died in 1530, and his influence had perished before him.



If, then, the substantial truth of Thynne's story be assumed, what could have been the poem that was either suppressed beforehand or was not allowed to be printed in the edition of 1532? There can be but one answer to this question. It must have been the 'Plowman's Tale.' This fulfils all the essential conditions which are required by Thynne's account. It is far more offensive in its tone than the 'Pilgrim's Tale,' or at least that fragment of the latter which has been preserved. It confines itself to no one religious order. It attacks all the members of the ecclesiastical body, and it attacks them with excessive bitterness. Once again confirmatory evidence of value comes from a source usually of little worth. Leland was a contemporary of the elder Thynne. The list he gives of Chaucer's writings is taken from the edition of 1532. His reference to this poem, which did not appear in that volume, is therefore the more noteworthy. He, to be sure, displays his usual capacity for muddling the information he imparts by confounding the production with Langland's work, and calling it the tale of Piers Plowman instead of the 'Plowman's Tale.' Still, there can be no doubt as to what he had in mind. He tells us that this poem, though attributed to Chaucer by the common consent of the learned, had been suppressed in the two editions which had already appeared—he means those of Caxton and Thynne—because it inveighed against the bad morals of the priests. In view of these facts, it seems to me that the weight of probability tends very strongly to the conclusion that it was the intention to include the 'Plowman's Tale' in the original edition of the complete works of the poet, and that

it was the interposition of some person high in authority that prevented the design from being carried into effect. If it was Wolsey whose influence caused this production to be suppressed, we may perhaps feel justified in reckoning the great cardinal as, after a fashion, among the editors of Chaucer. If he kept this poem out of the book, he was full as likely to have taken the course he did because he believed the work to be spurious as because it expressed hostility to the Roman Catholic church.

Nothing but the bitterness of religious controversy, coupled with defective literary sense, could have imputed the 'Plowman's Tale' to Chaucer in the first place. There was not a shadow of evidence in favor of the view that he was its author. It did not appear in the manuscripts of the great work of which it pretended to be a part. It was utterly alien in form and spirit to everything else which came from his pen. It was composed in a sort of verse that combined both ryme and alliteration. This, though common before and after his time, is something he seems sedulously to have avoided. Moreover, even if we could conceive the sentiments of the tale to be the sentiments of the poet, it is impossible to conceive that the expression of them could have been his. The savage vituperation in which the piece abounds is the characteristic of a school with which he has neither the slightest intellectual nor moral sympathy. For Chaucer, even when he is most satirical, is absolutely devoid of rancor. There was, too, a peculiar absurdity in putting this bitter production into the mouth of the Plowman. He in the general Prologue is represented as

of a kindly and gentle nature, doing his duty to his God, loving his neighbor as himself, and especially particular in the matter of paying his dues to the church. The Plowman of this piece is, on the contrary, after the order which the dreamer of Malvern hills had founded. He loved the service of his Maker without doubt, but the keenest sense of enjoyment he experienced was in hating his sinful neighbor.

None of these considerations, however, had the slightest effect upon the fortunes of the piece after it made its appearance in the edition of 1542. From that time it found a place in every folio that followed. That imputations were occasionally cast upon its genuineness there can be no question. This is clear from the argument prefixed to it in Speght's editions, which is evidently suggested in part by suspicions that were then current. It is, he tells us, "a complaint against the pride and covetousness of the clergy: made, no doubt, by Chaucer with the rest of the tales. For I have seen it in written hand in John Stowe's library in a book of such antiquity, as seemeth to have been written near to Chaucer's time." The epilogue to the 'Shepherd's Calendar' may indeed suggest that Spenser had some question as to its genuineness. But if his words can be made to bear any such interpretation, his doubts were not shared by many. The fact is that the Protestants of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had no more notion of giving up this poem than for a long time the extreme Trinitarians had of giving up the text about the witnesses in the epistle of John. It put the name then recognized as the greatest in English literature unmistakably

upon their side. Its vigorous outspoken invective was far more suited to their feelings and tastes than the covert irony and delicate satire of the genuine tales. It consequently received from them altogether greater attention than any of the latter. It was, in fact, looked upon as one of the sheet-anchors of Protestantism. References to it in controversial literature are by no means infrequent. Milton, indeed, turned its batteries later against the very church that had supplanted the Roman Catholic, and made a special application of its attack upon the earlier bishops to those of his own time. Nor throughout the whole seventeenth century does any doubt seem to have been entertained of the genuineness of the production. The first person, so far as I am aware, to assert his utter disbelief in its being the work of Chaucer was the antiquary John Dart. He stated the conclusion to which he had come on this point in the biography prefixed to Urry's edition of 1721. "I cannot go so far," he said, in speaking of the poet's political and religious views, "as to suppose he scurrilously reviled the established religion of those times, and therefore cannot think that either the Plowman's tale or Jack Upland were written by him." But this denial was itself practically disavowed by the text of the volume which treated the production as one of Chaucer's. It had, therefore, no perceptible effect upon the general opinion. In his work upon the 'History and Antiquities of Westminster Abbey,' published not long afterwards, Dart expressed himself upon the subject with far more plainness and vigor. Here he declared, without qualification, that Chaucer was not "the author of that scandalous railing



ballad, the Plowman's tale." It came, he said, from a quarter of less learning and more ill-manners. That quarter was not hard to find. It was indicated in the poem itself, in a passage in which the writer seems to say that he was also the composer of the alliterative poem called 'Piers the Plowman's Creed,' an imitation of Langland's more famous work. He pointed out, too, that the character, as described in the general Prologue, is on horseback, while the one that appears in this piece is on foot and carries a pilgrim's staff. With a bitterness that may have been born of personal experience Dart added that the Plowman of this tale "we may perceive to be a covetous hog by his railing against tithes, the too common cry of those sordid wretches."<sup>1</sup> But the antiquary preached to deaf ears. The work continued to be spoken of as a composition of Chaucer's, and that, too, by men of the highest learning. As such it was quoted by Warburton in his edition of Shakspeare.<sup>2</sup> Such it was assumed to be by Upton, who, according to his lights, was a diligent student of the early poet.<sup>3</sup> Warton, when he published his 'Observations upon Spenser' in 1754, had clearly never heard of any reflections upon its authenticity. In 1774, when the first volume of his 'History of English Poetry' appeared, he had begun to entertain some suspicion. In the text he spoke of the tale as having been attributed to Chaucer, but in a note added, "perhaps falsely." It is probable that it was the words of Dart that led

<sup>1</sup> Dart's *Westminster Abbey*, vol. i., pp. 86, 87.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. i., p. 369 (*Measure for Measure*).

<sup>3</sup> *Critical Observations on Shakspeare*, by John Upton, second edition, 1748, p. 410.



him to express himself thus cautiously. At any rate, the only reason he gave for his doubt is the principal one the former gave for his denial.

It was left to Tyrwhitt to expel this piece from the 'Canterbury Tales.' Since his time it has never made its appearance as a composition of the poet. To this great editor it is that we owe the first effort to sift the mass of matter that had accumulated in the volumes purporting to contain Chaucer's works and to separate what was genuine from what was spurious. He accomplished the work only in part; but it is a matter of surprise that he accomplished as much as he did. It was under peculiar disadvantages that he labored. He was furnished with none of the tests which modern scholarship has provided. No such knowledge of the earlier forms of the language then existed as now enables us in the case of most ancient productions to pronounce with a reasonable degree of certainty upon their approximate date of composition. Least of all was there in his time that scepticism in the air which disposes men to prefer the demolition of old beliefs to their maintenance, and which is sufficiently prevalent with us to insure in general much fuller intellectual sympathy with an attack upon the authenticity of a doubtful poem than with its defence. Tyrwhitt was led in most cases to reject the pieces he did by reasons that were purely literary. It is an interesting tribute to his unerring taste as a man of letters that the conclusions he reached through its agency in regard to the spuriousness of certain pieces have been confirmed by modern scholarship on grounds that are purely linguistic.

When Tyrwhitt took up the examination of the works attributed to Chaucer, four pieces included in Thynne's edition of 1532 had been already struck, as we have seen, from the list of the poet's writings.<sup>1</sup> They still continued to be printed among his works, but had prefixed the names of their real or supposed authors—Lydgate, Occleve, and Henryson. But no suspicion was generally entertained of the rest; at least, if entertained, it was not often expressed. The judgment of the first editor, though shown to be mistaken in these four instances, was accepted as correct for all the others. There were plausible reasons for this view. He lived nearer to Chaucer's time. He presumably had had access to manuscripts not now extant, and to sources of information that no longer existed. Respect was, in consequence, paid to his decision which hampered all attempts at examination, or rather prevented the idea of examination being entertained at all. Tyrwhitt was the first to break through this artificial barrier to investigation. His successors have gone much further than he, but it is to him that the opening of the way is due. The work he himself did, moreover, was far from insignificant. Indeed, as regards quantity, he threw out more than any one who has followed in his footsteps. A detailed statement makes this fact very clear. He rejected at once '*La Belle Dame sans Merci*'<sup>2</sup> for the very sufficient reason that it was a translation from the French of Alain Chartier, and Alain Chartier did not flourish till the century after Chaucer. In addition, the version was attributed in one of the manuscripts to Sir Richard Ros. He

<sup>1</sup> See pages 456-460.

<sup>2</sup> No. 13.

pointed out that there was evidence in favor of Lydgate's composition of the 'Ballad in Commendation of our Lady.'<sup>1</sup> His next step was much bolder. Purely on the ground of literary inferiority, he threw out three works. To attribute productions like these to the poet was, in his opinion, an imputation upon the poet's character. These were the pieces entitled 'A Praise of Women,'<sup>2</sup> the 'Remedy of Love,'<sup>3</sup> and the 'Assembly of Ladies,'<sup>4</sup> which last, indeed, purports to have been written by a woman. For reasons of the same kind, he discarded from the list of Chaucer's writings 'The Lamentation of Mary Magdalen.'<sup>5</sup> This he justly described as "infinitely meaner than the worst of his genuine pieces." It had been foisted into the first edition under the impression that it was the missing 'Origenes upon the Maudelayn,' spoken of in the 'Legend of Good Women.' The 'Plowman's Tale,' included in Thynne's second edition, he rejected on substantially the same grounds that have been given in the pages just preceding. Nearly all of Stow's additions to the folio of 1561 were thrown out unhesitatingly, and even remorselessly. Three of them—the two moral proverbs, the lines to Adam Scrivener, and the 'Court of Love'—he accepted. He pointed out that two others were ascribed in the manuscripts to Lydgate.<sup>6</sup> He saved himself, however, the trouble of any special investigation by declaring it was only a waste of time to sift with care this heap of rubbish. Recent scholarship has gone further than he in discarding the poems which the old antiquary collected under the belief that they

<sup>1</sup> No. 26.<sup>2</sup> No. 18.<sup>3</sup> No. 22.<sup>4</sup> No. 15.<sup>5</sup> No. 21.<sup>6</sup> Nos. 46 and 57.

were Chaucer's. Of the more than twenty-four hundred lines which he then caused to be printed, it accepts as genuine less than one hundred and fifty. About some of these also it expresses itself none too confidently. Of the additions made to the folios of 1598 and 1602, Tyrwhitt spoke hesitatingly of the authenticity of 'The Flower and the Leaf.' He rejected without qualification, however, the invective in prose entitled 'Jack Upland.'<sup>1</sup> This piece had been printed separately before the middle of the sixteenth century with the poet's name on the title-page.<sup>2</sup> From that it had been adopted by Fox the martyrologist in his 'Acts and Monuments of the English Church.' In that it was likewise ascribed to Chaucer. It then took its place in the folio of 1602. The new pieces which were added to the 'Canterbury Tales' by Urry met with the same fate as the 'Plowman's Tale,' though one—the 'Tale of Gamelin'—had some manuscript authority in its favor. None of them, however, were able to pass the literary test by which Tyrwhitt tried them. All were thrown out by him unhesitatingly.

The four pieces which had been previously transferred to other authors contained about fifteen hundred lines. Tyrwhitt relieved Chaucer, either directly or by implication, from any responsibility for the production of between ten and eleven thousand more. Most of the pieces he rejected will be sought for in vain in any regular edition that has appeared since his death. Their spuriousness became palpable to every one capable of judgment

<sup>1</sup> No. 65.

<sup>2</sup> "Jack Upland had been before printed with Chaucer's name on the title-page, about 1536-40," is the

statement of Mr. Bradshaw in a note to Thynne's *Animadversions* (ed. of 1875), p. 71.



as soon as any one of sufficient knowledge and critical insight was found courageous enough to declare it. Not but dissent from his opinion has occasionally been expressed, and sometimes in quarters where it could hardly have been expected. As late as 1835, a man of as much literary taste as Charles Cowden Clarke was found capable of standing up for some plainly spurious pieces. In that year he brought out a selection from Chaucer's works, accompanied with an account of his life. In discussing the writings of the poet in this memoir, he took the pains to inform us that there had not been wanting persons "who, either from affected zeal for his reputation or from religious partisanship, have ventured to question the fact of his being the author of 'Jack Upland' and of the 'Plowman's Tale.'" He might have added that no editor has ventured to publish these pieces among the works of Chaucer since Tyrwhitt's denial of their authenticity. One only of the productions rejected by him, 'A Praise of Women,'<sup>1</sup> has, for some inscrutable reason, been retained in many modern editions. Its composition certainly belongs to an earlier period than that of most of the discarded pieces. On purely linguistic grounds, it might perhaps be permitted to hold its place, in spite of two or three suspicious words. It is its literary character that is at fault. It is a very sincere effort to defend woman against the charges that have been brought against her, and by none more frequently than by the monkish writers of the Middle Ages. But the honesty of the poem is counteracted by its feebleness. It is pervaded from beginning to end by

<sup>1</sup> No. 18.



a general flavor of preachiness, not delicate but obtrusive, that imparts a sustained tediousness to the commonplaceness of expression in which the commonplaceness of its thought is embodied.

Certain other of the pieces rejected by Tyrwhitt, or not specifically mentioned by him, have occasionally made their appearance since his day. In Robert Bell's edition, under the heading of 'Poems Attributed to Chaucer,' occur several. Among them are the additions not regularly finding a place among the other works in the early folios, but inserted at the beginning and immediately after the Table of Contents.<sup>1</sup> Here also was included, probably under the influence of Wright, the 'Lamentation of Mary Magdalen.'<sup>2</sup> A weak and misleading argument was made for its possible genuineness. It was said that it might have been a composition of the poet's youth. It was represented as corresponding to the description of the work contained in the 'Legend of Good Women'—which it most certainly does not do. These assumed facts, combined with the "unbroken tradition of all the editions," constituted a mass of evidence in its favor which Tyrwhitt's opinion was held not sufficient to counterbalance. No one has since endorsed this view. It is therefore hardly necessary now to attack the genuineness of a piece that is no longer reckoned among Chaucer's productions. So much as this, indeed, can be said in its favor, that it is superior on the whole to the 'Praise of Women.' Negative commendation of such a sort is not of much value, however, and possible praise of the

<sup>1</sup> They are Nos. 36, 37, 38, 39, and 40.

<sup>2</sup> No. 21.

author has been practically exhausted when he has been given credit for good intentions. The 'Lamentation of Mary Magdalen' cannot, at best, be considered as doing anything more than record the utterances of a devout soul, which, with stammering lips and feeble tongue, expresses imperfectly and wretchedly what it may perhaps have seen clearly and felt intensely.

One piece there was, belonging to all the printed editions, which failed to attract Tyrwhitt's attention. At least this is true, that, so far from expressing any opinion either for or against its authenticity, he made no reference to it whatever. This is the poem that begins with the line "Mother of nurture, best beloved of all."<sup>1</sup> It is written in the strict three-stanza ballade form, with an envoy. In the way it has come down to us there is a verse lacking to the second of the three sets of stanzas. It reads like a translation from the French. Its literary character is so inferior that Chaucer's authorship of it might be safely denied on that score alone. The fact that for some reason it escaped Tyrwhitt's notice, and was therefore not excluded by him from the list of the poet's works, seems to be the only reason why it has continued to be retained. It still holds a place in most modern editions, either as a genuine or a doubtful work.

Tyrwhitt, however, accepted, though with occasional qualifications, a number of works as productions of the poet for which there was no evidence beyond the fact that they appeared in the printed editions of the sixteenth century. These pieces still keep their place—

<sup>1</sup> No. 6.

sometimes, indeed, under the head of doubtful poems—and they owe their retention mainly to his decision in their favor. The list includes the ‘Complaint of a Lover’s Life,’ or, as it was called in the old editions, the ‘Complaint of the Black Knight;’ ‘The Cuckoo and the Nightingale;’ the ‘Court of Love;’ ‘Chaucer’s Dream,’ and ‘The Flower and the Leaf.’ The viŕelay beginning “Alone walking” he spoke of as being “perhaps by Chaucer.” He accepted also the prose work called the ‘Testament of Love.’ The consideration of the part that treatise has played in the biography of the poet has been given in a preceding chapter, as well as the reasons for rejecting it.<sup>1</sup> To what has been said there, all that it is necessary to add is that the only ground for ever including this work among his productions was the fact that Gower, at the end of the ‘Confessio Amantis,’ represents Venus as enjoining Chaucer to set a crown upon all his previous labors by making “his testament of love.” It is not clear what Gower meant by the remark; it would probably be doing him no great injustice to suggest that he meant nothing in particular. The only explanation of his words that can at the first glance commend itself to consideration is that at the time of writing he had in mind the passage in the *Roman de la Rose* which speaks of the confession that the loyal lover is wont to make before drawing up his final testament.<sup>2</sup> In the translation this reads as follows :

<sup>1</sup> See pages 181–210.

<sup>2</sup> It is noticeable that in the spurious poem entitled *Chaucer’s Dream*

the lover is also represented as making his testament as he is expecting to die. See line 1167.

" But first, without repentaunce,  
I wol me confesse in good entent,  
And make in haste my testament,  
As lovers doon that feelen smerte."<sup>1</sup>

But however these unlucky words of Gower chanced to originate, it seems certain that they were sufficient to lead Thynne to insert the production entitled the 'Testament of Love' in his edition of the poet's works. He thereby inflicted a stain upon the poet's character which has hardly yet been effaced.

None of the productions in the list just given are mentioned by Chaucer himself. No allusion is made to them, or to anything contained in them, by any of his contemporaries. No manuscript attributes to him the authorship of a single one of them. On the other hand, manuscript authority does attribute to Lydgate the composition of the 'Complaint of a Lover's Life.' This is justified by the whole character of the piece. It is a most lackadaisical performance throughout, with little motive anywhere in it for continuing, and none for concluding. It is at last ended by the writer, as he himself tells us, because he can no longer keep awake. This, while a perfectly valid reason for its terminating when it does, would have been equally satisfactory for its having terminated at any point before, if, indeed, for not having been begun. Chaucer's words and ideas are echoed in a feeble way throughout the whole of it. Into it are introduced characters which he had made famous. There are several direct imitations of passages in his writings, especially of parts of the Knight's tale and of

<sup>1</sup> Lines 4609-12.



the 'Parliament of Fowls.' In particular, the famous description of trees in the latter work is very closely copied. To Lydgate, too, might fairly be ascribed, on the ground of internal evidence, the poetical address to the reigning monarch beginning with the line "Go forth, king, rule thee by sapience."<sup>1</sup> This was one of the few pieces which, probably on account of their brevity, were not specifically mentioned by Tyrwhitt. It is formal and prosaic, but it has one conspicuous merit. It is no more than fourteen lines long.

There is room for suspicion—there is not the slightest evidence whatever—that from the same source might have come the production entitled 'Chaucer's Dream.'<sup>2</sup> It is of a higher grade of poetry than Lydgate usually attains. Still, it is not so high but he could in happier moments have reached it. It contains, as do all his works of any length, a large number of phrases and turns of expression which are borrowed from Chaucer. In the general conduct of the piece, there is in places the most direct and obvious imitation. 'Troilus and Cressida,' in particular, is laid under heavy contribution. The complaint of the knight also bears in certain lines a striking resemblance to the somewhat similar complaint found in the 'Death of Blanche.' These are the things that doubtless led Tyrwhitt to admit its authenticity; for the poem is the work of a disciple who has faithfully studied his master's language, though he had failed to grasp the secret of his master's manner. There are also in the production occasional passages which reflect so clearly the style, and even repeat the

<sup>1</sup> No. 33.

<sup>2</sup> No. 62.



words, of the 'Romance of the Rose' that they convey the impression that the existing translation is a work with which the author of this piece must have been familiar. The title given it at its publication was probably due to Speght. He certainly was taken to task for it by Francis Thynne. The antiquary observed that its real name was the 'Temple of Glass.' It is so called in the only manuscript now known to be extant. This is, however, as inappropriate a designation for it as the one with which it has come down. The place where the scene is principally laid is, indeed, described as enclosed by a wall and gate of glass; but in the whole poem there is not the slightest mention of any temple. 'The Isle of Ladies' is a title which has lately been bestowed upon it, and which exactly with the nature of its contents, which are of a sentimental and ideal nature.

Like so many of these spurious works, this production has played a conspicuous part in the biography of the poet. In regard to its origin, this began when it made its first appearance in an edition of 1598. In that volume we are told that it was borrowed forth the courtship and marriage of two persons, himself, as well as of his patron, John of Gaunt. This fanciful notion was long accepted as fact. The name of the author has also been used to prove his familiarity with the manners of the court. Even had the poem been written by Chaucer, there would have been no just ground for the inferences about his life that have been drawn from the scenes and incidents described in it. The fact that it is not his composition has only the effect of making the supposition of its spuriousness there can scarcely be too strongly urged.

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evidence for the authenticity of the piece beyond the opinion of the honest but unpoetical old antiquary John Stow. They would be forgiven by some were there sufficient merit in the work to counterbalance the lack of direct testimony. This cannot be accorded it. The production is, indeed, better than most of the spurious pieces with which the poet has been credited. It is about up to the level of Lydgate at his very best. It is below the standard of Chaucer at his worst.

Not one of the pieces, indeed, that have so far been thrown aside has the slightest claim to literary merit of a high order. Many of them are lacking in merit of the lowest order. They are deficient alike in ideas and expression. Poorness of thought and of language is of itself no absolutely decisive proof of spuriousness. Famous poets have at times done work as bad as that of anybody. Yet even then it is extremely rare that something of the master's spirit does not manifest itself somewhere; if nowhere else, it is pretty sure to do so in the metre. The great writer cannot easily get out of the habit of saying what he sets out to say, no matter how poor, in good verse. It is in this particular that the deficiencies of all these pieces are very marked. Interest has attached to two or three of them on account of their supposed references to Chaucer's personal fortunes; but the interest has been of a purely biographic nature, and in no sense due to the excellence of the productions as works of art. The poet's reputation has not suffered in the slightest by the rejection of any one of them from a place among his writings. On the contrary, it has been decidedly benefited by the rejection

of most. The case is different with the three that remain to be examined. Whoever it was that wrote these works, none of them is unworthy of Chaucer. Each, of course, must be considered on its own merits. There is, however, one thing that can be said about them all. Like the previous productions which have been discarded as spurious, there is no external evidence in their favor. The sole ground upon which they can be attributed to Chaucer is that they were received as genuine by the first editor of his complete works.

One of these is entitled 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale,' or, as it is sometimes called, 'The Book of Cupid, God of Love.' When it made its first appearance in print, it had following it a ballade of three stanzas with an envoy. The two might, indeed, be regarded as entirely separate pieces. There was nothing in the way they were originally published to indicate that the one had any connection with the other. But as the ballade had little meaning unless it were supposed to refer to some poem preceding, they have been since invariably conjoined. So they appear in every edition. It is scarcely possible to believe that they are the production of one and the same person. Two pieces of verse could hardly be more unlike. The one is as tame and prosaic as the other is fanciful and charming. The envoy of the ballade, moreover, is distinguished to a distressing degree by that profusion of Latinized words which forms so marked a characteristic of the vocabulary of the writers of the middle and latter half of the fifteenth century. Tyrwhitt, who admitted the genuineness of 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale,' rejected the



poem which now appears regularly attached to it. He remarked of the two perfect manuscripts he had seen containing the former that in the one the ballade was not found at all, and that in the other it was appended to the 'Book of the Duchess.' "I cannot believe," he concluded, "that it was written by Chaucer." There seems, in truth, no ground for considering it as belonging to the piece beyond the fact that it was originally printed in such a way as to give that impression.

'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale,' as it stands by itself, is a poem of a good deal of beauty. The metre is defective in places, but a comparison of the manuscripts—of which there seem to be fully half a dozen—would perhaps render it possible to restore the original text with a fair degree of precision. Its grammar does not vary materially from that of Chaucer's time. It does not violate a single one of the metrical tests. The scene of it is laid at Woodstock, so early and so long associated, rightly or wrongly, with the poet's life. There is embodied in it, also, a reference to the idea that underlies the 'Parliament of Fowls.' These were perhaps the reasons which caused it to be ascribed to Chaucer in the first place, in addition to the fact that its opening lines are taken from his writings. In it, also, are found sentiments which he was often in the habit of expressing, and phrases he was in the habit of employing. The objection to its genuineness on the score of not having been mentioned by him could be met, moreover, by the assumption that it was a production of his later life. For this there would be sufficient authority in the poem itself. The writer of it, whoever he



was, terms himself "old and unlusty."<sup>1</sup> If this be taken as the statement of an actual fact, it would fully explain Chaucer's failure to mention the work in the list he gives in the prologue to the 'Legend of Good Women;' though this, of course, would not explain the similar failure of Lydgate to record its production. On the other hand, there is much about it unlike anything else Chaucer wrote. The metre employed in it does not characterize a single one of the remaining works imputed to him, whether they be genuine or spurious. Nor is there a single specimen of it to be found in his undisputed writings save in the envoy accompanying the 'Complaint to his Purse.' It has variations of far greater importance than this. It is pervaded by a peculiar delicacy of sentiment. But it is not Chaucer's delicacy. Its tone is not his tone, nor is its manner his manner. Abounding in play of fancy as it does, it lacks entirely that veiled irony which in his undisputed writings crops out in most unexpected places, and in most unexpected ways, whenever he is dwelling upon the passion of love. These differences are in themselves far from being decisive, nor are they sufficient to warrant the expression of very positive opinion. There is scarcely a prolific author of genius who has not written some one thing which stands out, as regards style and sentiment, in sharpest contrast with the rest of his works. Still, with the absolute lack of any external testimony in its favor, a difference of manner and diction is fairly entitled to a good deal of weight in coming to a decision. While it may be unwarrantable, therefore, to reject 'The Cuckoo and the

<sup>1</sup> Line 37.

Nightingale' unconditionally, it must be reluctantly conceded that the weight of evidence is against its genuineness.

The next work to be considered is 'The Flower and the Leaf.' Of the doubtful poems this is much the most familiar by name to all, and is the favorite of most. It has had the rare fortune to interest specially many distinguished admirers of the poet. It has been modernized by Dryden, by Lord Thurlow, and by Wordsworth. Keats devoted a sonnet to the celebration of its beauty. Other testimonies to its attraction could easily be furnished; but these are enough to countervail hostile criticism and even discourage lukewarm praise. There is nothing, indeed, more noticeable in the individual man of genius than his capacity to find some piece admirable which the rest of the world looks on as being at best hardly endurable. But when several men of genius, belonging to different periods, possessed of widely different tastes, and enlisted under the standards of opposing literary schools, unite in rendering the same verdict, it is always becoming, to say the least, for their inferiors to concede the reality of excellence which they may perhaps lack the ability to appreciate fully, or even the eyes to see at all.

No manuscript of 'The Flower and the Leaf' is certainly known to be in existence. One, however, is said to have been seen a very few years ago, and may at any time be brought to light. At present, therefore, we are obliged to have recourse to the edition of 1598 for the only text that can be deemed authoritative. Unfortunately, this is far from being in a satisfactory state. It

can hardly be supposed to represent the work precisely as it came from its author's hands. Of the less than six hundred lines which the poem contains, at least seventy-five, as originally printed, were more or less defective. The imperfections were not of the kind that affect the sense, but they were such as to impair or destroy the harmony of the verse. Different measures have been taken by different editors to restore the lines to their supposed integrity. The variations that have been introduced by design, or have crept in by accident, as the work has from time to time been reprinted, render the modern versions of the poem unlike the one originally published in many slight details, and to some extent unlike each other. There are verses, it must be admitted, that would require for their restoration changes and additions of too conjectural a cast to command the assent of all. Still, a thorough and systematic emendation of the text of 1598, in accordance with the principles which the comparison of manuscripts has established, would result in presenting us this production in a form nearly perfect in the matter of metre.

This poem has been thought to have other evidence in favor of its genuineness besides the mere fact that Speght, under the inspiration of Stow, chanced to include it in his first edition. There are two places in the 'Legend of Good Women' where it is supposed to be mentioned. They both occur in the prologue. In the first passage Chaucer adjures all who can write to assist him in celebrating the daisy. In this case, he says,

“ Oughten ye be diligent  
To further me somewhat in my labou<sup>r</sup>,  
Whê<sup>1</sup> ye be with the leaf or with the flower.”

Later on there is a longer passage touching upon this same matter. For reasons that will shortly appear, it is one that demands special attention. Chaucer wishes his praise of the daisy and of all that love flowers, for its sake, not to be misunderstood. On this point he declares his sentiments in the following lines :

“ But nathêless ne ween not that I make<sup>2</sup>  
In praising of the flower again<sup>3</sup> the leaf,  
No more than of the corn again<sup>3</sup> the sheaf.  
For as for me is liefer<sup>4</sup> none ne loather;<sup>5</sup>  
I am withholden<sup>6</sup> yet with neither nother.<sup>7</sup>  
N’ I<sup>8</sup> not<sup>9</sup> who serveth leaf ne who the flower;  
Well brooken<sup>10</sup> they hir<sup>11</sup> service and labou<sup>r</sup> :  
For this thing is all of another tun,  
Of oldê story ere such strife was begun.”

As indicating the particular poem of ‘The Flower and the Leaf,’ every one must concede that these verses are of the very vaguest character. But even their importance as conveying a vague reference is destroyed by the fact that Chaucer is in no wise singular in this way of expressing himself. The same reference occurs in other writers then living. Gower sees Cupid surrounded by a vast assembly of those who had once been lovers. Before them all upon the plain stood, like a captain, Youth at the head of his happy company, with

<sup>1</sup> Whether.

<sup>2</sup> Write poetry.

<sup>7</sup> Neither the one nor the other.

<sup>3</sup> Against.

<sup>4</sup> Dearer.

<sup>8</sup> Nor I.

<sup>9</sup> Know not.

<sup>5</sup> More disliked.

<sup>10</sup> May they enjoy.

<sup>6</sup> Committed to the side of.

<sup>11</sup> Their.



"Hire headès kempt, and thereupon  
 Garlanded, not of one colóur,  
 Some of the leaf, some of the flower."<sup>1</sup>

More noteworthy than this, however, are three short poems of Chaucer's French contemporary, Eustache Deschamps.<sup>2</sup> They are all written upon this same subject. In two of them he expresses his preference for the flower over the leaf; in the third, of the leaf over the flower. In none of these could there be, nor is there, the slightest allusion to the work now under discussion. But the words of Deschamps do make clear what might have been inferred, though not with the certainty desirable, from the lines referring to the same subject that have just been quoted. The flower and the leaf had become symbolical of two opposed parties. The beauty, the perfume, the transitoriness of the one are contrasted with the usefulness, the enduring freshness, and the permanence of the other. Godwin supposed that the flower symbolized idleness. Others have supposed it to mean merely indulgence in pleasure. Both views, which are not essentially dissimilar, are based upon the language of this particular English poem. In that the assertion is expressly made that the party of the flower consists of those who spend their lives in idleness and in quest of amusement. But these are the charges, it must be kept in view, of a votary of the leaf. Such a one-sided interpretation of the allegorical meaning could not be deemed to impute much credit to Chaucer, who

<sup>1</sup> *Confessio Amantis*, vol. iii., p. 358 (Pauli). *Deschamps*, iv. 257, 259, 262 (Société des Anciens Textes Français).

<sup>2</sup> *Euvres Complètes d'Eustache*



is particular to declare himself attached to the interests of neither. One, he takes pains to inform us, is no dearer to him than the other. Nor is any such interpretation borne out by the passages and poems in which both are mentioned. These, when considered together, show us what must have been the ideas couched under these names. The flower and the leaf really represent the two parties which have always existed, and will always continue to exist, in human society—the one that strives to make life beautiful, and the other that strives to make it heroic. In every community can be found those who range themselves exclusively under the standard of each. The loftier ideas which both set out to realize contain much to inspire and ennoble. But to both also there is an unlovely, if not a debasing, side. In the one, the tendency would be sure to manifest itself to look upon life wholly as a scene of enjoyment, and this was certain in the case of some to degenerate into a devotion to sensual pleasure. In the other, there would be a corresponding tendency manifesting itself, to look upon life as a scene for the display of pitiful ambitions, or, at best, of harsh and narrow asceticism. A nature so highly strung and evenly balanced as Chaucer's might well believe that truth lay not wholly with either party, satisfied that there was no irrepressible conflict between the joy of life and the endeavor of life, and that upon the harmonious combination of the two, in the career of the individual man, depended the hope of his highest development. Certainly there can be no possible interpretation of the allegory which would justify the assumption that the lines in 'The Legend of

Good Women' have any reference to the work entitled 'The Flower and the Leaf.'

Tyrwhitt, though he accepted this poem as a production of Chaucer, was not altogether satisfied as to its genuineness. He expressed doubt, but what his reasons were for entertaining it he did not say. It was probably the difference of style, to which a man of his literary taste would be keenly sensitive. Joined to this, possibly, was the fact that the work purports to be written by a woman. It is a woman who sees the sights recorded in it, and who is herself several times addressed by one of the characters as "my daughter." This is a difficulty that much troubled editors and biographers, so long as Chaucer was regarded as the unquestionable author of 'The Flower and the Leaf.' Godwin characteristically solved the problem by taking the ground that the poem must have been a translation. This enabled him to establish the doctrine of original female authorship, and at the same time maintain the genuineness of the borrowed version.<sup>1</sup> What was lacking to this assumption was something that bore the nature of evidence. It can be conceded that the probabilities are strongly in favor of the view that the work was written by a woman. Too much stress, however, has been laid upon this point. No one looks upon it as anything remarkable for a woman to write in the character of a man. It is hard to see what fault can be found with the reverse process, or what special obstacles hinder it from being carried into effect, though there is no doubt that at an early period it would be an unusual proceeding.

<sup>1</sup> Godwin's *Life of Chaucer*, vol. ii., p. 350.

Still, on this ground alone there is no insuperable objection to regarding the work as a production of Chaucer. The difficulties in the way of accepting it as his are of a far graver cast. It fails to conform to all the rules which are generally observed by him in his undisputed writings. It fails to conform to them not merely once or twice, but constantly. There are about a score of instances in which words ending in *-ye* and *-y* ryme together. Full as noteworthy is the character of the seven-line stanza, in which this poem is written. That in Chaucer's usage, as has been pointed out, is nearly always complete in itself. The sense and the sentence both end with the seventh line; and the instances in which this does not occur do not amount to a score<sup>1</sup> in all his admittedly genuine works. But about this poem there is nothing in its versification more marked than the extent to which the opposite state of things prevails. Of the eighty-five stanzas of which 'The Flower and the Leaf' is composed, fully one third are incomplete in themselves. They join the one that follows sometimes without a break sufficient to justify the interposition of a comma. Moreover, nearly all the rules of ryme, which depend ultimately upon grammatical termination, are persistently violated. Preterites, such as *was* and *grew* and *rong*, ryme with infinitives and adverbs and plural adjectives which end in *-e*, such as *passe* and *newe* and *longe*. The preterites and past participles of the weak conjugation are also made to form rymes.

The remarkable thing, of course, is that so many of these variations from the constant practice of the poet

<sup>1</sup> See page 398.

occur in a piece of a little less than six hundred lines. They were usages that in Chaucer's age were beginning to creep into the language of literature. They occasionally exhibit themselves in his writings. In the age that followed they became, and have since remained, firmly established. Their frequency in 'The Flower and the Leaf' indicates, with a certainty that may almost be deemed positive, that the work is a production of the fifteenth century. This view is further supported by the fact that the order of the Garter, founded not earlier than 1344, is spoken of in the poem in a way to give the impression that it had been for some considerable time established. The conclusion to which these various reasons lead is not altogether a pleasing one. A work with the beauty and grace which 'The Flower and the Leaf' exhibits is not discarded willingly from the writings of a great author. Still, the evidence at our command leaves hardly a doubt upon the point. The piece is the production of one of the school which the poet had unawares founded. The poem is, to be sure, different in style from anything he has written, though not so much so as to justify exclusion from his acknowledged productions on that account. But it repeats in several instances his phrases. It has caught, moreover, the melody of his versification, so far as the condition of the text will permit us to make a general statement upon that particular point. While Chaucer cannot be deemed its author, it must be conceded that no small share of the master's mantle has fallen upon his nameless follower.

We come now to the poem entitled 'The Court of Love.' This is another work in the seven-line stanza.



The manuscript from which it was taken by Stow and inserted in the edition of 1561 is still in existence. There can be little doubt of the defective character of the poem as it has been preserved. An unmistakable gap occurs between the one hundred and eighty-eighth and one hundred and eighty-ninth stanzas, and an apparent one between the one hundred and forty-sixth and one hundred and forty-seventh. In the matter of genuineness, this production presents the least difficulty of any of the three under discussion. The evidence against its being a work of Chaucer's is overwhelming. It fails, in the first place, to conform to every test which has been laid down. It rymes together constantly words belonging to the groups designated by their endings in *-ye* and *-y* and *-e*. It surpasses 'The Flower and the Leaf' in the extent to which it rymes words that grammatically have different terminations. Of the two hundred and six stanzas of which it consists, there are more than thirty cases in which the sense is carried on from one to another. In the second place, there are references to characters which Chaucer had made famous—references which an imitator and admirer might be supposed to make, but which would have been most unlikely to have come from the poet himself. Alcestis and the "ladies nineteen" of her train, mentioned in the 'Legend of Good Women,' are introduced. So likewise are Anelida and Arcite and Troilus. Besides, the very names of two of the characters, Philogenet and Philobone, point to the composition of the poem as belonging to a period when the study of Greek was reviving in the West, and that did not even begin till after the capture of Constantinople in 1453.



There are doubtless those who will not admit the force of arguments of this kind. It may be conceded that, of themselves, they can never be absolutely decisive. But the grammar of the poem proves beyond question that it does not belong to the fourteenth century. On this point there can be no difference of opinion among students of English. The piece shows scarcely any traces of the inflection still continuing to be employed in Chaucer's day. Almost the only ones, indeed, are the use as a separate syllable of the *-en* of the infinitive and of the *-es* of the genitive singular and of the plural of the noun; and both of these terminations are not uncommon in the poetry of the earlier half of the sixteenth century. As more or less avowed archaisms, they occur long after that time. Were the 'Court of Love' printed in modern orthography, its late origin would at once be made unmistakable. It presents scarcely any difficulty to the ordinary reader outside of certain words and phrases. For the peculiarity about this poem is that it has a modern grammar with an archaic vocabulary, and the vocabulary has at times been borrowed without being thoroughly comprehended. In the modernness of its grammar, neither 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale' nor 'The Flower and the Leaf' shows anything like its approach to later forms.

But the 'Court of Love' does something more than reject inflections employed by Chaucer himself. It makes use of others that were not common in his age; of some, indeed, that have never been in actual use in any age. Of one grammatical form, hitherto little noticed, it is desirable to speak at length, because it may

be of value in helping to determine not merely the genuineness of any given work, but remotely its date of composition. This is the employment of *do* and *did* in the so-called emphatic conjugation. It would not be proper to say that this usage did not exist in the Midland dialect of the fourteenth century. But it is certainly safe to assert that it had then but little recognized standing in the language of its literature. Sporadic instances of the employment of *do* and *did* with the infinitive, to denote respectively the present and preterite tenses, do occur in it before the fifteenth century. As early, certainly, as the thirteenth, the usage had made its appearance in the speech. It can be found in the writings of Robert of Gloucester, and in some other productions.<sup>1</sup> Still, it is not common; so far as the Midland dialect is concerned, it can, certainly, be called rare. It is doubtful if more than one or two genuine cases of the present common employment of this verb can be found in Chaucer's undisputed writings.<sup>2</sup> With him *do* and *did* with the infinitive had almost invariably the signification which in modern English is usually represented by 'cause' or 'make.' In the Nun's Priest's tale, for illustration,

"Do thilke cart arresten boldely"

does not mean "Do boldly stop that cart," but "Boldly cause that cart to stop." The same general statement can be made of the usage of Chaucer's contemporaries

<sup>1</sup> E. g., "As the bok us doth lere."  
—*The Early South-English Legendary*, edited by Horstmann, vol. i.,  
p. 263 (E. E. Text Society, 1887).

<sup>2</sup> On the whole, the most unequivocal instance I have observed is line 444 of the *Monk's Tale*:

"Is ther no morsel breed that ye do kepe?"

Langlande and Gower. It is true that they made occasional use of this construction; it is certain they did not make use of it often.<sup>1</sup>

It was in the fifteenth century that it first became common, at least in the Midland dialect, to employ *do* and *did* with the infinitive to form a present and a preterite. It is naturally met with in the King's Quair of James the First of Scotland; for the language of the North always anticipated that of the South in the welcome it gave to new forms. Still, it is noticeable that in Barbour's 'Bruce' the inflection appears very rarely, if at all. It is not infrequent in Lydgate; and it occurs in many of the spurious poems that found their way into the Chaucer folios. The remark is more particularly true of the preterite *did*. This was the first to establish itself on an extensive scale, which it did by supplanting the earlier form *gan*. The corresponding use of *do* with the infinitive to denote the present tense is probably not later, but it is not apt to be so common until later. Accordingly, its frequent use under ordinary circumstances would give the impression that a particular poem in which it is so found could not well have been composed before the end of the first quarter of the fifteenth century. It is consequently a legitimate position to take, that the frequent use, as above described, of *do* and *did* in any given production is *prima facie* evidence that the production could not have come from Chaucer. This

<sup>1</sup> One of the most marked instances of this usage I have happened to observe in the *Confessio Amantis* is in this line (vol. iii., p. 145):

"As the chronique it doth reherce."  
But there are also *doth . . . disguise* (i., p. 133), *did . . . transforme* (i., p. 142), and *did . . . exile* (ii., p. 156).

one test would of itself bear heavily against the genuineness of the 'Court of Love.' Such forms as *do hight*, *doth stick*, *doth shine*, *doth write*, *doth hew*, *doth please*, *doth stir*, *doth beat*, *doth unshut*, and *doth purvey*, occurring in a poem of fourteen hundred lines, would be hard to explain, even were there evidence of no other kind to meet.<sup>1</sup> Had there been but two or three instances, a charge of corruption might have been plausibly urged. Their number shows them to have been the work of the author, not the blunder of the transcriber. This view is further supported by the fact that they enter too essentially into the framework of the line to allow of any emendation that would exclude them. No instance of this usage occurs in 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale;' and but one instance—the preterite *did honge*—is to be found in 'The Flower and the Leaf.'<sup>2</sup>

But though the 'Court of Love' must be rejected from the list of the poet's writings, there is no need to deny it the merit which it unquestionably possesses. It was internal evidence that led Tyrwhitt to admit its genuineness. Working with purely literary tests, he was fully justified in arriving at the conclusions at which he did. For, though much the latest of the three poems that have been under discussion, it comes the nearest, both in spirit and expression, to the manner of the great source of them all. It has much of Chaucer's lightness of touch, his finish of style, and his delicacy of satire. Its literary quality is in places high. The concluding anthem of the birds, in particular, is in a strain of exquisite mel-

<sup>1</sup> See respectively lines 145, 675, 787, 798, 980, 1008, 1068, 1090, 1245, and 1396.

<sup>2</sup> Line 245.



ody. But there is about the production a remarkable characteristic. It is not only an imitation, it is an intentional imitation. The writer was thoroughly familiar with Chaucer's works and influenced by his diction. He abounds in his peculiar phraseology. Sentence after sentence occurs, of which the idea has been suggested to him, if not directly inspired, by some passage in his favorite author. In several instances parts of lines are taken bodily from the great poet's writings. These, it is to be added, are usually the places that would present the most serious difficulties to the reader unacquainted with our early speech. Assuming that the work as preserved correctly represents the condition of the work as originally composed—and this there is scarcely any reason to doubt—there seems no escape from the conclusion that its author made a conscious effort to reproduce the manner of a poet he admired in the language of a period which he did not fully understand. He was trying to do earlier what Spenser tried to do later. This much can be said for him, that the latter failed more signally than he. Still, it was a failure on his part. The archaisms he introduced into his work would not have been objectionable had they been correct. But the poem needlessly contributes to English speech inflections that have never been used by English speakers since the language has had written monuments to show what it really was. The author experienced, in particular, that difficulty with the proper employment of the final *-n* in the forms of the verb which has beset and misled most, if not all, of the imitators of the grammar of the past. This lack of acquaintance can be seen in lines like the following:



"Whether that she me <i>helden</i> lief or loth."	347.
"Till time thou <i>seen</i> thy lady eft."	499.
"In secret wise they <i>kepten</i> ben full close."	526.
"That goddess chaste I <i>keepen</i> in no wise To serve."	684.
"If by me this matter <i>springen</i> out."	725.

These are the errors of a man striving to do what he has not the special knowledge to accomplish. So large a number of impossible forms—and not all have been given—cannot be attributed to gross oversight on the part of even the most stupid of scribes. On the other hand, they could not have been changes made intentionally. Such changes are introduced to conform to the language of a later time—to put something which the copyist understands in the place of what he does not understand. He would be little likely to replace grammatical endings that were unknown to himself by other endings that had never been known to anybody.

The four works that have just been considered were accepted by Tyrwhitt. They comprise together nearly forty-six hundred lines. The denial of their genuineness sensibly affects, therefore, the amount of production with which the poet is to be credited. As a result of the various critical efforts that, from an early period, have been directed to the mass of material which went under Chaucer's name, about seventeen thousand lines once imputed to him have been discarded as not of his composition. Of the works in prose and poetry represented by the seventy-seven titles that have been given, two<sup>1</sup>

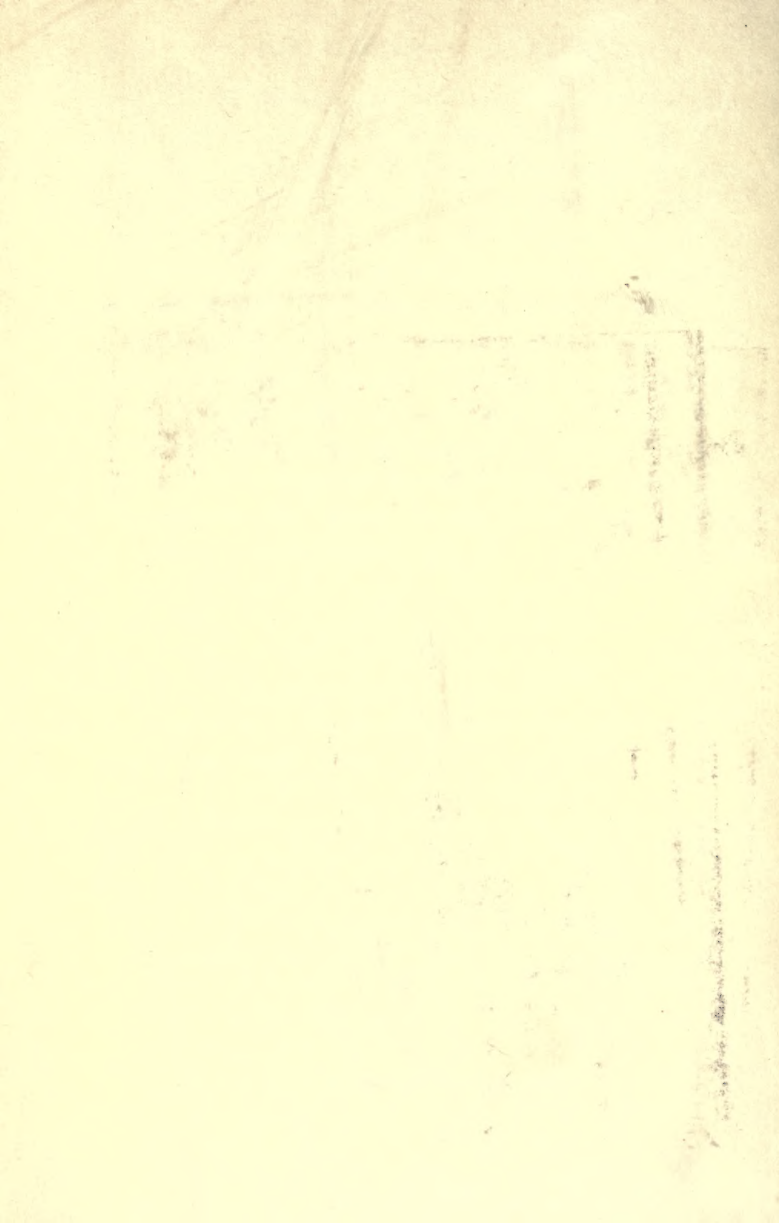
<sup>1</sup> Nos. 70 and 76.

may still be deemed doubtful, and forty-eight<sup>1</sup> can be pretty safely rejected as spurious. Among the latter must be reckoned one of the additions made by Stow to the folio of 1561, which is accepted by Professor Skeat as genuine, and included in his edition of the 'Minor Poems.' This is the piece entitled a 'Ballade against Women Unconstant.' But there is nothing in it to show that it is a production of the poet, and a good deal to show that it is not. Its literary quality is poor. The selection by its author of one of Chaucer's own heroines, Cressida, as an example of unfaithfulness, is not in Chaucer's manner, though common enough among his imitators. On the other hand, the evidence in favor of another one of the additions—the so-called 'Amorous Complaint'—is fairly strong, and it may be regarded with a good deal of reason as genuine. The examination that has been made leaves as works about which there is no dispute twenty-six titles.<sup>2</sup> There still remains one, and the discussion of the genuineness of that will require a special section of its own.

<sup>1</sup> Nos. 4, 6, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 33, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40 (1532); No. 41 (1542); Nos. 42, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60 (1561); Nos. 62, 63 (1598); No. 65 (1602); Nos. 66, 67, 68 (1721); Nos. 71, 72 (1856); Nos. 73, 74 (1866); No. 77 (1888).

<sup>2</sup> Nos. 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 19, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 34 (1532); Nos. 43, 44, 58, 61 (1561); No. 64 (1602); No. 69 (1856); No. 75 (1866). The dates after these numbers do not mean when the poems indicated were first printed, but when they were first included in what purported to be a complete edition of Chaucer's poetical works.





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